Interpersonal Dynamics in Team Leadership and the Tenure of Youth Pastors

by

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Dedicated to:

The late Rev Neil Oosthuizen, a mentor to many
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Summary

The research presented in the following pages explores interpersonal dynamics in church leadership which may adversely affect the tenure of Youth Pastors in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). Since 2006, eight resolutions passed by the Conference of the MCSA have noted a concern around the appointment of Youth Pastors. When Youth Pastors depart from their positions it can have an adverse effect on the young people, the Youth Pastor and the ability of the church to be faithful in youth ministry. Literature supports a long tenure for sustainable youth ministry.

A sample group of ten participants was selected and interviewed. The average tenure of the sample group was calculated; comparisons were drawn between those who served for longer and shorter than the average tenure. The aim of the research was to provide information to the MCSA that might reduce the problem of disrupted Youth Pastor tenure by determining the factors contributing to departure.

Both the literature review and the empirical research demonstrated that the Youth Pastor’s relationship with the minister is critical to a positive job experience. Some of the factors contributing to negative interpersonal relationships include an autocratic minister, a lack of support and a church leadership that lacks insight into youth ministry. The majority of the sample expressed a largely unmet expectation that their minister should provide them with spiritual and personal support. They commonly experienced conflict with their minister, particularly when one minister left and a new minister arrived. Most Youth Pastors who underwent negative departures cited conflict with the minister as a primary factor in their departure. However, there were others who experienced similarly difficult interpersonal dynamics, yet chose to remain in their positions.

Thus, the question of why Youth Pastors leave was slowly overshadowed by a new question which seeks to understand the factors that contribute to Youth Pastors choosing to remain. The empirical research suggested that the qualities more frequently observed among long tenure participants were (1) a clearly articulated call (2) a love for the youth (3) a mentor outside the local church and (4) a sense of responsibility to fulfil a vision for the youth ministry.

The theory of action to be presented to the MCSA involves a more rigorous discernment process for prospective Youth Pastors, the provision of a wider web of relationships for Youth Pastors as well as the youth themselves, mandatory mentorship for all Youth Pastors and a platform for the Youth Pastor to receive feedback.
Key Terms

YOUTH
The term “youth” refers mainly to adolescents, in other words people in the stage of life between biological maturity and social acceptance into the adult world. The term is interchangeable with terms used by the authors quoted in this paper, such as “kids” and “teenagers.” The term youth can also include children, as in government documentation where the term refers to all people under the age of 18.

YOUTH PASTOR
The term “Youth Pastor” refers to an individual employed by a local church for the purpose of carrying out youth ministry either in a full time or part time capacity. Certain authors use the term Youth Worker.

PASTOR/MINISTER
The literature review often refers to the “Pastor” of the church, whereas the empirical research refers to the “Minister” which is the term used in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

CONNEXION
The term “Connexion” or “Connexional” refers to the unique interconnected structure of the MCSA. Local churches (known as societies) are grouped to form geographical circuits. Circuits are grouped to form districts. All of the districts together form the MCSA.

TENURE
The term “tenure” refers to the period of time in which the Youth Pastor remains in an appointment in a local church. The participants in the sample group were divided as follows:

Long Tenure Departed
This refers to those participants who departed from a Youth Pastor position within the past four years, having served in that position for longer than the average tenure of the sample group.

Short Tenure Departed
This refers to those participants who departed from a Youth Pastor position within the past four years, having served in that position for shorter than the average tenure of the sample group.
Long Tenure Active
This refers to those participants who had been actively serving as a Youth Pastor for longer than the average tenure of the sample group (at the time of the interview)

Short Tenure Active
This refers to those participants who had been actively serving as a Youth Pastor for shorter than the average tenure of the sample group (at the time of the interview)
Abbreviations

MCSA
Methodist Church of Southern Africa

LD
Long Tenure Departed

SD
Short Tenure Departed

LA
Long Tenure Active

SA
Short Tenure Active
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1.1. Theme Selection
I was employed as a Youth Pastor in the MCSA from 2005 to 2013. During this time, I became aware of the frequency with which fellow Youth Pastors seemed to depart from positions under negative circumstances. I observed deep hurt in the lives of Youth Pastors who were dismissed or resigned. In informal conversations, it seemed that most of these individuals pointed to interpersonal dynamics as the primary reason for their departure. I also observed brokenness in congregations where the departure of Youth Pastors led to conflict, resentment and a disrupted youth ministry. I asked myself:
Is this an acceptable pattern in the life of the church?
What are the factors that cause a Youth Pastor to depart?
What can be done to prevent hurt and disruption?
These questions led to the conceptualising of the theme, which explores the impact of interpersonal dynamics on the tenure of Youth Pastors in their appointment in local churches.

1.1.2. Area of Research
This phenomenon constitutes a wide subject field, but this study will be confined to Practical Theology, further focussed on the sub-discipline of Youth Ministry. It is geographically limited to the Johannesburg region (the Central and the Highveld & Swaziland District of the MCSA). Heitink (1999: 6) states that Practical Theology “as a theory of action is the empirically oriented theological theory of the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society.” Practical Theology is unique in that it seeks to “evolve new understandings of God, in particular, concrete situations that call for action” (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 544).

While upholding the unity of all forms of Practical Theology, there is a need for moderate differentiation (Heitink 1999: 244) in a particular domain. Heitink (1999: 249) lists three action domains of Practical Theology, namely Society and Religion, Church and Faith and Man and Religion. Of the three action domains, this research falls into the domain of Church and Faith. Sub-disciplines include oikodomics and catechetics. Pastoral Theology (when referring to the role of those in church office) gives insight into the identity, competence and spirituality not only of the Youth Pastor but other pastoral role players as well.
1.1.3. Description of the Context

There are two interconnected praxes pertaining to the subject matter:

i. The MCSA and its relevant church structures and models.

ii. God’s coming to young people through youth ministry in churches.

The MCSA follows a “Connexional” structure. The term “Connexion” relates to the interconnectedness of societies within the denomination. Societies are located throughout Southern Africa in a diversity of settings including rural, urban and suburban. The phenomenon of Youth Pastors has been limited mainly to suburban, formally “white.” The financial resources available to these churches exceed that of churches in rural and township settings as a result of the historical economic injustices of the country.

It has been widely recognised in the MCSA that the denomination has faced difficulties concerning Youth Pastors. The Conference of the MCSA resolved in 2013:

“2.4. LAY AND YOUTH PASTORS
Noting that Lay and Youth Pastors play an important role in the ministry of the MCSA and that there is no formal or standardised theological training nor set guidelines outlining their appointment, stationing, remuneration and other employee service conditions, Conference therefore resolves:

2.4.1. To refer the appointment and conditionals of service of lay pastors and Youth Pastors to EMMU and Human Resources for consideration and report to the 2014 Conference

2.4.2 To place a moratorium on the contractual appointment of lay pastors and Youth Pastors for a year with effect from 1 January 2014. “

It is my understanding that the abovementioned resolution resulted from complaints from various congregations about the tendency of Youth Pastors to depart under negative circumstances. These departures caused the young people in the church congregation to depart from membership of the church.

According to Swanborn (1987: 377 cf Heitink 1999: 225) concerning the tasks of Practical Theology, “a situation or process is studied which someone feels should be changed.” The moratorium confirms that this situation is indeed in need of change.
1.1.4. Background information

In a study by Kageler (2008: Kindle 1570) on the tenure of Youth Pastors in ministry, respondents were given the opportunity to list up to three reasons for their departure from a local church:

- 94% of Youth Pastors who were dismissed cited “conflict with the Pastor and/ or Church leadership.”
- 44% of Youth Pastors whose departure was due to burnout stated that they found it difficult to get along with the senior pastor.

1.1.5. Relevance of the Research

The phenomenon whereby Youth Pastors depart under negative circumstances is a theological problem because it impedes the ability of the body of Christ to fulfil its responsibility to the young people entrusted to it. The theological basis for this task lies with the integral role and identity of young people in the community of faith (Nel 2000: 15, 17) and the “inalienable and untransferable responsibility” (Nel 2000: 79) of the local church for their spiritual nurture and guidance.

Notwithstanding the responsibility of parents in spiritual formation, the reality of our times has necessitated the provision of a larger extended family where young people can come to an understanding of God through natural relationships with those outside of their immediate family. De Vries (2004: 79) writes that “it is unrealistic to expect that all parents will be equipped and prepared, in and of themselves, to lead their children toward Christian maturity.” Myers (1987: xviii) refers to “faithing adults who incarnate God’s love in genuine, appropriate ways.”

One might argue that the role of a Youth Pastor has no Biblical precedent. However, the tumultuous nature of today’s society necessitates adults who are trained to address the particular challenges faced by young people. Nel (2000: 118) describes the “era of professional ministry”, writing: “In some social contexts in this country, the challenge is indeed so overwhelming that one can easily believe that only professionally trained people can remedy the matter. Youth workers are raised to the level of a ‘special task force’” (Nel 2000: 118).

The church, then, has a responsibility to put people in positions of leadership for the purpose of facilitating youth ministry with as much stability as possible.

Young people identify closely with those whom they admire, and emotional responses...
dominate the brain processes of adolescents. Therefore, it is likely that young people who have
developed a relationship with their Youth Pastor will be significantly impacted with a sense of
loss on an emotional, mental and spiritual level should their Youth Pastor depart under
negative circumstances. The result of this impact on individual youths can collectively lead to a
widespread reduction in young people’s wellbeing and their attendance and investment in the
life of the church.

1.1.6. About the Researcher
I have been employed full time in the MCSA for over ten years, formerly as a Youth Pastor. My
involvement has included the provision of training of Youth Pastors within the MCSA. Given my
personal participation in youth ministry, it was important to listen not only to the
dialogue of subjects in the study but also to my internal conversations and thoughts. Osmer
(2008: Kindle 59) explains the importance of understanding the difference between insider and
outsider, observer and participant. I acknowledge my personal presuppositions and bias. It is
crucial to be aware of this perspective both for its value in deepening the study as well as with
cautions against the tendency to become subjective. I am no longer employed in the capacity of
Youth Pastor, which enables distance. I am not so deeply involved in the problem that it could
be considered a hindrance to the study (Heitink 1999: 226).

1.2. FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM AND THE PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

1.2.1. Problem
Negative interpersonal relationships between Youth Pastors and church leadership often result
in an end to their tenure in the church, causing disruption in the local church’s capacity to
develop healthy, sustainable youth ministries thus preventing the church from fulfilling its
theological mandate to spiritually nurture and guide young people as an integral part of the
faith community.

This ministry problem may reveal several underlying theological issues in the ecclesiology of
the churches involved, for example:

- A lack of insight whereby church leadership undermines youth ministry
- A weak ecclesiology whereby local churches operate in a non-collaborative “silo” approach
- A lack of insight and skill in the area of conflict resolution on church leadership teams
1.2.2. Aim

To present to the MCSA a theory of action based on practical-theological research, aimed at addressing the phenomena of negative interpersonal relationships that impact on the tenure of a Youth Pastor.

Although I did not make use of a formal hypothesis, I disclose that I had in mind that the most effective solution for improving the longevity of Youth Pastors was to equip ministers with the tools to develop more positive relationships with the Youth Pastors in their churches. The source of this suggestion was an intuitive “hunch” that there is a link between the tenure of Youth Pastors and their interpersonal relationship with their minister. The task undertaken was to discover whether this relationship could be “detected in reality” (Heitink 1999: 231) through analysis of the factors.

1.2.3. Question

What are the factors contributing to negative interpersonal relationships between Youth Pastors and the other members of church leadership teams?

1.2.4. For whom is it a problem?

The problem is owned by the Church, where the responsibility for ministry to young people resides. The problem has an impact on Youth Pastors who depart from positions under negative circumstances and the congregations that employ them, particularly concerning the young people in (or connected to) those congregations.

1.3. METHODOLOGY

Heitink (1999: 220) describes three perspectives of Practical Theology - Strategic, Hermeneutic and Empirical. Heitink (1999: 163) describes three key concepts in the methodology of practical theology: Understanding (hermeneutic), Explanation (empirical) and Change (Strategic). In formulating a theory of action, one enters into the regulative circle to form strategy intended to “steer” future developments (Heitink 1999: 201). The change is desirable, and yet change is complex.
While remaining connected to the other two perspectives, empirical research facilitates a deep level of understanding of the human experience of the subject. Although the quantitative approach is valuable in research for analysing and understanding numeric data, the field in this particular paper is not wide enough to develop meaningful statistics. A strictly numeric approach would be likely to result in a study which fails to engage with the essential human components of the problem and “a reduced rationality” (Heitink 1999: 221). The qualitative approach is better suited for intensive, in-depth study of a small group of individuals in a narrow field of study.

There are many methodologies or strategies of enquiry which could achieve the outcome for this research. For the purpose of this study, the chosen approach is an empirical and qualitative approach based on Post-Foundationalism. Post-Foundationalism stands between the extremes of Foundationalism (aiming to acquire “absolute truth”) and Non-Foundationalism which embraces a “multiversity” of knowledge and relativity (Muller 2011). Both extremes make interdisciplinary understanding difficult. The former seeks to assimilate knowledge into one’s personal understanding of absolute truth, and in the latter, there is “scepticism about any effort to create mutual understanding” (Muller 2011). Three movements of Post-Foundationalism are (1) a radical basis in contextuality (2) an interdisciplinary focus and (3) a basis in transversal rationality (Van Huysteen cf Muller 2005: 3).

The methodology follows the Post-Foundational research model by Muller (2005:8-9) and includes the following steps, summarised as follows:

1. A specific context is described
2. In-context experiences are listened to and described
3. Interpretations of experiences are made, described and developed
4. A description of experiences is made as they are continually informed by traditions of interpretation
5. A reflection on the religious and spiritual aspects such as God’s presence as understood and experienced in the situation is presented
6. A description of experience thickened through interdisciplinary investigation
7. The development of alternative interpretations that point beyond the local community is provided
Chapter 2: Overview of Youth Ministry

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Having set the framework within the field of Practical Theology, this chapter turns attention to the field of youth ministry as a sub-discipline in this field. Dean (2002: Kindle 3) notes that Practical Theology has until recently been “altogether absent from the youth ministry equation.” She asserts the case for thorough practical theological reflection on the praxis of youth ministry. Youth ministry, as a sub-category of Practical Theology, “assumes that young people are called to take part in every practice of Christian ministry, to participate in the total mission of the church” (Dean 2001: 19 - 21). The field of youth ministry is interconnected with other sub-disciplines in Practical Theology, but is distinctive in its specific attention toward young people. The differentiated needs and specialised approach associated with young people sets youth ministry apart as a unique endeavour in Practical Theological reflection.

What is youth ministry?

Youth ministry is defined by Nel (2005: 97) as “the mediation of the coming of God through his Word and through people, by means of all modes of ministry, and in a differentiated and focused way, to, with and through youth as an integral part of the local church.”

To explore this definition is to consider two parties in the equation of youth ministry. On one hand, there are the young people whose need for all modes of ministry must be met in a differentiated and focused way. On the other hand, there is the church whom with rests the responsibility to facilitate God’s coming to the world of young people through the modes of ministry. Both parties are inextricably bound to God who loves both God’s church and the young people. God chooses to involve the church as co-creators and mediators in God’s coming to young people.

In this chapter, we explore the nature of young people and the nature of the church in order to more fully understand the framework in which this study is located.
2.2. YOUNG PEOPLE

“We cannot do youth ministry without giving careful theological, psychological and sociological thought to the world of adolescence” (Robbins 2004: Kindle 706).

A study of youth ministry must acknowledge and consider the young people themselves. In many cultures, “special rites of passage exist to initiate pubescent boys and girls into adult society” (Osmer 1996: 11). In societies that are influenced by Western thought, however, there are limited rites to help young people to navigate the transition from puberty to adulthood. This lack of clear rites of passage is characteristic of many contexts within Southern Africa. The journey from childhood to adulthood has become a tumultuous one.

Penner (cf Dean 2001: Kindle 8495) asserts that “very few adults would argue that contemporary adolescence is marked by pressure, stress and pain unlike any known in recent history. Broken families, uncertain peer relationships, addictions, abuse, fear of the future, terror in the present, confusion about the past, these are the realities our young people live with.” It is critical that the church recognises the unique challenges and opportunities in its ministry to adolescents.

Little (1968: 43 – 47) offered four statements to summarise the inner desires of the adolescent:

- “I want to be me
- I want to make a difference
- I want to be a part
- I want to love and be loved."

For the church to be faithful in its ministries to young people, the church must seek to understand young people and address their needs. The current adult generation is not the first to despair over the challenges faced by (and sometimes perceived to be caused by) young people. Even before the development of adolescence as a stage in the life cycle, it was recognised that there are challenges inherent to the process of growing up. Van den Heuvel (1966: 106 cf Nel 2000: 40) quotes a remark that has been ascribed to Socrates at approximately 500BC:
“Youth today loves luxury. They have bad manners, have contempt for authority, no respect for older people, and talk nonsense when they should work. Young people do not stand up any longer when adults enter the room. They contradict their parents, talk too much in company, Guzzle their food, lay their legs on the table and tyrannize their elders”

Nel (2005: 9) notes that “in all of society the youth are the centre of attention; sometimes because of their numbers, at other times as a result of their rebellion, sometimes because of their poverty or their involvement in crime, sometimes as result of their academic and/or democratic frustrations.” He continues with the following challenge – “churches are challenged to notice the youth, to know them, to sense their needs and to serve them.”

2.2.1. Adolescence and Youth Culture

Adolescence is a stage in the life cycle from the time that an individual enters puberty until the time that he is considered an adult in society. Santrock (1990: 28 – 29) notes that it “begins in biology and ends in culture.” Osmer (1996: 11) describes the period of adolescence as a “transition from childhood to adulthood.”

i. The Emergence of Adolescence in Society

Osmer (1996: 3) notes that adolescence is a “relatively new social phenomenon” which developed alongside and as a result of the industrial revolution. Society today is structured in such a way that various age groups have minimal contact with one another. For most waking hours of the day young children are in preschools, scholars are in class with same-age children, adults are in the workplace and the elderly are often taken care of in facilities for the aged. Such segregation was not always the norm. Prior to the nineteenth century, society was structured in such a way that family members of all ages lived and worked alongside one another in generationally diverse environments. Most children and youth began working at a young age on the family farm or in the family business, with progressively greater responsibility while remaining dependent or semi-dependent on their parents well into their twenties (Osmer 1996: 6). There was not an “in between” time, rather they were considered adults from the age of twelve or fourteen (Nel 2005: 31). Youth ministry - as we understand it today - did not exist, because the church itself was a family organisation where members of all ages participated together rather than separately (Corbett & Johnson 1972: 3).

When the Industrial Revolution began in the 1800’s, society rapidly began to change. As a result of this advanced industrialisation, children began to work and live away from their
home and their families, often under extremely challenging circumstances as they faced poverty, sickness and cruel employment conditions. Osmer (1996: 13) describes a shift whereby “the extended family declined in importance, and geographical mobility became more prevalent.”

In the early stages of the industrial revolution, almost half of the workforce in American factories was made up of people in their teenage years (Kett 1977: 29). As the workforce became more competitive, it gradually became common for young people to attend secondary school, previously a luxury reserved only for the wealthy (Osmer 1996: 6). High School was mandatory in the United States of America by the late 1930’s. For the first time in history, young people spent most of their time with their peers. The educational system became a “waiting room” of sorts, until such a time as society was ready for the contribution of young people to the community and the workforce. The practice of prolonged education removed young people to a large extent from the world of adults, set aside in a moratorium from economic responsibilities.

Thus began the development of the social phenomenon of adolescence as described by Stanley Hall in a two-volume work in 1904. Kotesky (1991: 42) refers to adolescence as a “cultural invention.” The word adolescence is derived from the Latin word “to grow” (Nel 2005: 30). Nel (2000: 32) aptly refers to adolescence as an “in-between time.” There emerged an increasingly lengthy period from the time of puberty to the time when society would allow that individual the right of “sharing in the symbols that adult society attaches to maturity” (Nel 2005: 31) such as procreation, relative independence and earning an income. In the meantime, the adolescent has been expected to develop and mature within what Nel (2005: 32) describes as “an almost artificial emotional and social vacuum.”

ii. Adolescent Culture

The emergence of adolescence as a phase in the human life cycle facilitated the development of adolescent culture. “Culture” refers to the dominant norms of behaviour and values in a given society. “Subculture” refers to the specific standards and values dominant in a smaller group within that culture (Nel 2005: 28). In the case of adolescence, the rise of the adolescence gave rise to the development of youth culture. To attempt to describe the contemporary youth sub-culture is problematic. Firstly, all sub-cultures change frequently and rapidly. Secondly, one would have to describe several youth sub-cultures rather than one. Nel (2005: 28) notes how youth sub-culture “differs from place to place – from a residential area in which violence and power rule to a wealthy and stable suburb.”

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As difficult as it may be to describe youth culture, it is nevertheless important to attempt to understand the prevailing youth culture in the community as far as possible. Doing so enables the church to effectively impart the message of the gospel in a way that is relevant and easily understood. Dean & Foster (1998: 176-177) comment that “the art of good translation is imperative if the gospel is to have any credence and gain any sort of hearing among the youth with whom we minister” – a process they refer to as “eavesdropping for the sake of the gospel.” Willis (1993) offers several areas in which youth culture becomes apparent – “personal styles and choices of clothes, selective and active use of music, TV magazines; decoration of bedrooms, the rituals of romance and sub-cultural styles; the style, banter and drama of friendship groups; music-making and dance.” It falls outside the scope of this research to attempt to describe youth subculture. Rather this research focuses on a small number of traits that are commonly acknowledged as being pertinent in the current climate of the adolescent culture.

iii. Developmental Changes in Adolescence

Young people undergo significant changes during the period of adolescence concerning sexual maturation and neurological development. The onset of puberty brings physical changes including menstruation in females which is “reported to be dropping from as late as an average of 14.5 years old a century and more ago, to as early as 11 years old today” (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2001: Kindle 913). Cognitively, adolescents begin to develop formal operations and can think abstractly (Dean & Foster 1998: 182). The areas of the brain responsible for emotion become dominant in the adolescent brain - “the adolescent brain is wired for passion” (Dean 2004: 6). Dean & Foster (1998: 116) explain that “teenagers have trouble sorting through lesser emotional claims in favour of primary ones; every emotion is primary to a teenager.” Young people feel fragile and vulnerable (Dean & Foster 1998: 196). It is unsurprising then that adolescence is regarded as a “highly spiritual stage in the life cycle” (Dean & Foster 1998: 29). As early as 1907, Hall (1904: 368) described adolescence in the following terms - “at no time of life is the love of excitement so strong as during the season of accelerated development of categorised which craves strong feelings and new sensations.”

Swiss psychologist Piaget proposed four stages of mental development: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete and formal operational (Jacober 2011: Kindle 441). It is in early adolescence that the child gains the ability to think in abstract terms, moving into the formal
operational stage. It is beneficial for individuals practising youth ministry to familiarise themselves with the characteristics of this period of mental growth in order to provide developmentally suitable instruction and ministry opportunities to adolescents.

iv. Frustration
Given the waiting period imposed on adolescents along with biological and hormonal changes, it is unsurprising that frustration and rebellion have become familiar characteristics of youth culture. Osmer (1996: 13) comments that “learning independence while prolonging dependence creates many of the difficulties characteristic of this period.” Nel (2005: 32) describes young people as being in a situation where their natural change processes are met with opposition by an adult world not willing to integrate them into society. As a result, young people undergo the process of change “against the adult community rather than in fellowship with them.” Nel (2005: 33) describes the reaction of young people as an anti-culture or pirate culture where symbols of adulthood, such as procreation and earning money, are looted. It is as if they are saying - “According to your rules we are not allowed this or that, therefore, in the meantime, we do it like this: our language, our values, our fashions, our terms, our religion.” Music “has always been an integral part of youth culture” (Dean & Foster 1998: 201). Given that music forms an important aspect of the worship ministry of almost all denominations, this is one opportunity to present the retelling of the story of God in a manner that is relevant and translated to the “language” of the youth.

One cannot attempt to describe youth sub-cultures without giving some attention to the characteristics of the dominant adult culture. Youth sub-cultures develop to a large extent as a “contextual reaction” (Nel 2005: 40) to adult culture. It would fall outside the scope of this research to attempt to describe adult culture in detail, but the emergence of Postmodernism is discussed briefly in Chapter 3. One comment related to the development of this worldview is the manner in which the pluralism of postmodern culture affects the youth subculture. Dean & Foster (1998:15) describe the way in which postmodernism affects adolescents’ sense of direction – “inundated with options and the stress that comes from having to choose among them, contemporary adolescents have lost their compass.”

v. Age-Appropriate Self-Absorption
Nel (2005: 34) describes age-appropriate narcissism (ego-centrism) as one of the defining characteristics of adolescence. This trait is necessary for the process of identity formation but can become an unhealthy dynamic when reinforced through the influences of a highly fractured and intensely consumerist society.
vi. The Search for Identity

Erikson (1963: 11) built on this approach, offering a theory that outlined eight stages of human development. In this theory, adolescence is a stage in which the primary psychological task of the individual is to find an identity. Erikson (1963: 11) defined identity formation as "the construction of a sense of sameness, a unity of personality now felt by the individual and as recognised by others as having consistency in time." Phrased differently, "as the adolescent develops the ability to “think about thinking” her favourite subject for reflection is herself" (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 6616). Clark (Senter III 2001: 28) notes that adolescence is a time when "one tries on different “selves.”" Jung (1971: 121) referred to this process of individuation as “becoming one’s own person” while Santrock (1990: 226) described it as “a sharpened sense of one’s distinctness from others.” Osmer (1996: 9) summarises three primary tasks related to identity formation: “(1) They must ready themselves to leave home, establishing some measure of economic and psychological independence from their families of origin; (2) they must learn how to make their way through the maze of relatively autonomous institutions and roles characterizing modern society; and (3) they must construct a personal system of moral meaning.” When a young person has not successfully constructed a diffuse identity, they are “unable to make long-lasting adult commitments” and “drift aimlessly from one relationship and job to another” (Osmer 1996: 21).

Osmer (1996: 26) suggests that the church responds to these challenges by providing “a communal context in which persons are given support in achieving a post-conventional religious identity.”

Identity formation is not a task which happens in isolation but community, influenced by reflection on the prevailing culture surrounding the adolescent. Osmer (1996: 3) describes the phenomenon with the following comparison: “as surely as toddlers need the mirroring of parents, adolescents need the mirroring of the surrounding culture.” Jacober (2011: Kindle 444) explains that the unhealthy alternative to identity formation is “identity confusion, a failure to form a stable and secure identity.”

Theologically, the search for identity is not merely a psychological task of development or a by-product of society’s expectations, but “becoming the person God created and recreated you to be: someone in Christ” (Nel 2005: 101). Nel (2005: 101) describes how this theological premise eliminates fear in the process of identity-formation because “children and adolescents become what they are ... the outcome is given.” Dean (1998: 56) comments...
that the following two objectives were listed as primary in a synthesis of all major Protestant, Catholic and Jewish youth programmes: “(1) to help youth navigate safe passage into adulthood” and (2) to offer youth a specific faith/cultural identity.”

Relationships are a crucial factor in the task of identity formation in the lives of adolescents. Young people struggle “to construct a coherent sense of self that not only knits together the unique events of their own lives but also projects possible futures in the adult world” (Osmer 1996: 3). Dean & Foster (1998: 46) write that “significant relationships with Christians are crucial if we stand any chance of forming an identity that takes into account who we are in God’s eyes.”

2.2.2. Faith Development

It has been found that one of the primary objectives in youth ministry in every major religion is to offer youth a specific faith/cultural identity (Dean & Foster 1998: 56). Holmsbee (2007: Kindle 485) states that “spiritual formation in a Christian tradition answers a specific human question: What kind of person am I going to be?" Youth ministry “leads adolescents to their identity in Jesus Christ” (Dean & Foster 1998: 56). Dean & Foster (1998: 110) comment that “if Christian identity is the goal of youth ministry (and it is), then ministry with adolescents immersed in the search for self must take seriously practices that transform youth, not merely occupy them, for Christ’s sake.”

Faith development is therefore related to such a search for identity. Fowler (1992: 5) produced a framework of predictable and sequential stages of faith development in human beings. The earliest predictable stage is the “intuitive faith” of early childhood. In this juncture, significant adults provide imagery for a foundation of faith development. This phase makes way for further development into a “Mythic-literal” (Fowler 1992: 5) stage of faith development, characterised by an emphasis on narratives, justice and faithfulness of God. The third stage is “Synthetic-conventional”, a stage common in late childhood through to adolescence. In this stage, faith becomes more interpersonal and is linked to the community and peer group. The individual seeks to normalise his or her beliefs and values based on the convention of those around her. One does not automatically advance from this stage toward the more advanced stages of faith. In these stages, one begins to evaluate, critique, question and humbly surrender oneself to God. Progression may be influenced by the level of spiritual nurture and guidance provided to the growing individual. Robbins (2004: Kindle 9695) offers the following insight, based on the premise that most young people in a typical youth group will fall into the category of Synthetic-conventional faith:
“Fowler’s research helps us to understand how significant the youth group community can be in helping a student to develop spiritually, especially if there is a strong group inertia toward spiritual growth and excitement about Jesus. On the other hand, it helps us to understand that it is not a stopping place for development. If a youth ministry is not helping students to develop a faith apart from the group – to move beyond conventional faith to individuative faith, then it ceases to be a stepping stone and becomes a stumbling block.”

Nel (2005: 146-147) comments on Fowler’s insights, noting that “churches who take faith-development seriously help themselves by offering material that is phase-relevant and simultaneously facilitates development towards the next phase.”

Notwithstanding this, the discussion around faith development must always acknowledge that faith is a gift from God and that no one but God has the power to impart faith. The apostle Paul wrote - “Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their role in the lives of young people and responsibility towards them seriously labour. For we are co-workers in God's service” (1 Corinthians 3: 6 – 9). Robbins (2004: Kindle 9688) reminds us that “we are not trying to start a fire from coals that do not exist.” God is already at work in the life of an individual before the intervention of youth ministry begins. Youth ministry is the action of people coming alongside God in the faith development of the young person – not imparting the faith but facilitating the growth of the faith which has been given (Nel 2005: 146).

Dean & Foster (1998: 34) describe a healthy Youth Pastor as one who recognises that “nothing she plans will “cause” faith, and a good deal can happen that actually obstructs it ... still, in spite of everything, she learns that Christ prevails where she cannot.”

In a poignant description, the task of facilitating faith development in the life of a young person is described in terms of midwifery: “If faith ultimately comes in God’s time and in God’s way to each of us – then what in the world is the catechist’s job? To practice midwifery, that’s what. Midwives/ catechists attend to the birth of faith, which is the Great Physician’s responsibility” (Dean & Foster 1998: 163). Nel (2015: 190) offers a reminder that “only through the Spirit and under his guidance is true discipleship of Christ possible” (Nel 2015: 191). Robbins (2004: Kindle 9679) points out that this understanding of faith as a gift from God “does not negate Fowler’s basic premise of how faith develops, but it significantly affects the way we think about what faith is developing toward.” The church is called to take its role in the lives of young people and responsibility towards them seriously.
while maintaining an awareness that it is God who is instrumental in the giving of children (Psalm 127) and the development of their faith. The church is a facilitator - called to do neither more nor less than to come alongside that which God is already doing because of God’s love for God’s people. Phrased differently, “any ministry that wants to do more than reveal the care of the caring Lord attempts the impossible and the inessential” (Nel 2015: 161). Osmer (cf Zcheile 2012: 49) writes: “The primary actor in spiritual formation is not the congregation. It is the Holy Spirit as she builds up and equips the congregation for mission and as she empowers the congregation to carry out its particular vocation.” He furthermore presupposes that formation ought not to be viewed as “a form of socialization in which the congregation simply imposes certain habits and routines on its members” (Osmer cf Zcheile 2012: 52).

2.2.3 The Need for Significant Relationships
Adolescents display an exceptional capacity and need for relationships: “The most foundational understanding we must carry with us as youth workers, then, is that both boys and girls are created in the image of God, “male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). This essentially means that the basic makeup of both men and women, and therefore boys and girls, is relational, for God as a three-person unit is relational (John 1:1-3)” (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 1036-1038).

“Cognitive psychology teaches us that significant relationships are the adolescent equivalent of a transitional object. Significant relationships become the “blankies” youth carry with them to mediate their passage from the familiar territory of the primary family into the public and sometimes scary world of adulthood” (Dean & Foster 1998: 27). This need for relationship includes both peer and adult relationships, but the focus in this section is their need for significant relationships with adults in the faith community. This is not to say that the need for peer relationships is insignificant, but that the structure of contemporary society almost guarantees that young people will have access to peers in their immediate social surroundings. This is therefore not seen as an area of deficiency in the lives of most adolescents. On the other hand, most adolescents are increasingly denied the opportunity for a meaningful web of relationships with adults. Hersch (1998: 20) described the “generational threads that used to weave their way into the fabric of growing up” which can no longer be taken for granted or expected in the life of an average adolescent. The Carnegie Council on Youth Development concluded that “adolescence has become a waiting period of enforced leisure with few responsibilities and little or no meaningful contact with adults” (Robbins
Osmer (1996: 18) describes how societal changes have diminished the role of adult guides in the lives of adolescents: “Traditionally young people have been able to look to their elders as repositories of the community’s wisdom. They have received from them trusted moral guidance and a broader historical perspective of the problems facing them in the present. Generational discontinuity makes it more difficult for this type of exchange to take place.” Mead (1970: 45) highlights the importance of adult presence in the lives of adolescents by warning against the danger of what she calls a “co-figurative culture—a culture in which all learning is horizontal, and little or no learning comes from an older and wiser generation.” The Search Institute has found that “every child needs a relationship with at least three adults other than a parent in order to be healthy” (Strommen & Hardel 2000: 215). Kageler (2008: Kindle 338) notes the importance of lasting relationships between youth and adults, writing that “youth need to build connections with adults and there are not that many arenas in our society where that is happening.” In an article on the trait of “resilience”, Guttman (1999: 5) found that the strongest predictor of the trait of resilience in young people was “an adult mentor outside the immediate family—grandmother, a minister [for example]—who gave them a sense of being loved and important.” A 1991 report of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development showed that the one factor in youth ministry outweighing all other factors is the presence of an “adult guarantor” – an adult who “sees in them the potential they do not necessarily see in themselves” (Dean & Foster 1998: 27; Dean 1991: 51). De Vries (cf Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 3453 – 3455) writes that “when a student makes it to mature Christian adulthood, she can almost always point either to the influence of godly parents or to the influence of at least one available, durable, non-exploitive Christian adult who modeled for them what being an adult Christian was all about.”

In comparison to adolescents, adults are likely to offer a more consistent “self” in various arenas of life even in a society in which “characterized by the gradual separation of political, economic, educational, familial, religious and other life spheres into relatively autonomous subsystems” (Osmer 1996: 14). Peers are still trying to define an identity and are more likely to display diverse behaviour and values in different contexts. Young people are exposed to many separate spheres in life, often with little coherence to one another as described by Nel (2005: 38): “Society does not relate these institutions to one another. The youth start playing roles and they do it well. At church you behave in one way and when you are at sport in another and often complete different way and so on. The tragic thing is this can happen without any meaningful identification with any of these institutions.” According
to Osmer (1996: 15), this kind of distancing of roles is one of the “most powerful individualising forces in modern society.” Oosterguard (cf Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 5026-5029) writes – “Teenagers are looking for authentic and transparent role models. People who are not willing to simply play a certain role but who live on the outside what they are inside. People who are appropriately open about their struggles, hurts, and doubts—in other words those issues that young people can identify with.” Davis (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 7322) points out the need for stability in the tumultuous developmental task faced by teenagers – “Adolescence is a truly stressful time of constant change. The psychological goal for adolescents is to try and establish some kind of adult stability for themselves—to figure out who they are, what they believe, who they want as friends, and who they want to become.”

2.3. THE CHURCH

“Youth ministry is not a game. It’s a strategic calling of God’s church” Chap Clark (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 8903-8904)

The church is the praxis from which we launch the reflection on our practices in youth ministry as they relate to the disrupted tenures of Youth Pastors. “Such reflection can help us uncover areas where our organizational efforts are getting in the way of our faithfulness” (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 7264-7265).

The church exists “for the sake of the one who brought it into being” (Nel 2005: 25). Its purpose is derived from its nature (Nel 2015: 29). The church is God’s plan for restoring a broken world until all things on heaven and on earth are brought together under Christ as head of all (Ephesians 1: 22-23). The church does not exist for its own sake or as an alternative to a “social club” but is focussed outward with its identity firmly rooted in the mission of God, aiming to seek and to bring Kingdom change to communities and to the world. It aims to be an agent of God’s healing, restoration, redemption, reconciliation and justice. The church may be described as an “in-between” or intermediary (Nel 2015: 44), sent by the triune God, just as the Son is sent by the Father and the Spirit sent by the Father and the Son. When local congregations lose this emphasis and turn their focus inward, it has moved “far away from what it was created for” (Nel 2015: 46). Easum (2001: 27) writes that “we gauge faithfulness by a congregation’s willingness to follow Jesus into the mission field.” Thus an outwards focus is not only necessary but crucial.
God comes to the world through the congregation using a variety of distinct yet interwoven communicative acts or modes of ministry, namely preaching, worship, care, community, teaching, service, witness, and leading. The Gospel of Christ is “the essential, indispensable element in all of God’s communicative acts” (Nel 2015: 111). Each one of these holds the same value as the others. The neglect of some of the modes of ministry in favour of others is detrimental to the well-being of the church and compromises the church’s identity as agents of God’s mission in the world. Nel (2015: 71) uses the comparison of a “picky eater” child to describe churches which focus only on the modes of ministry which are palatable to that particular congregation or culture: “When this happens, an undernourished congregation is formed – a congregation that may stubbornly refuse to adapt to a different and well-balanced diet.”

He stresses that “developing a missional local church has to take the whole of the gospel seriously in the service of the communication of the gospel” (Nel 2015: 71). As agents of God’s saving mission in the world, the church seeks to bring all people into relationship with God through Christ Jesus. This includes young people. Nel (2015: 15) describes the covenant relationship between God and God’s people and then asserts the following: “Youth Ministry does not merely receive a number of fringe benefits from these. It is fully rooted in it. God has founded the relationship, in Christ and through his Spirit. No new sacrifice is necessary. It is fulfilled – for children and adolescents as well. To be active in youth ministry, is nothing less than working with youth in the Name of this God.” This section explores the responsibility of the church toward young people by exploring the historical practices of youth ministry, a Biblical perspective of young people and the needs of young people. All of this is undertaken with an awareness of the missional nature of the church.

2.3.1. Historical Overview of Youth Ministry and the Church

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, youth ministry as we know it today did not exist (Nel 2005: 8). Within the rural setting youth were “seen as a part of the family and approached as such” (Nel 2005: 8). The dramatic changes in society during the Industrial Revolution raised a new need for specialised care for young people. Rather than the church taking the lead for this new opportunity, “individuals took the initiative” (Nel 2005: 51). Robert Raikes founded the first Sunday School in 1780 in England with the aim of providing basic literacy and Bible education to children. As public education improved, the emphasis shifted to outreach and Christian teaching. Societies and leagues began to develop from 1888 – 1930, again with individuals at the helm. The Young Men’s Christian Association was founded by George
Williams in 1884 (Scholund 1977: 61) as a means of reaching out to young people living away from their home environment. By 1874 it had reached South Africa. The *Young People’s Society for Christian Endeavour* was founded by Dr Francis Clark in Portland in about 1860 (Nel 2000: 52). It was based on a ministry to young people that was offered to young people in Brooklyn, the USA by Dr Cuyler. The Society for Christian Endeavour grew rapidly, its success “unprecedented as a religious movement” (Scholund 1977: 62). Christian Endeavour is an example of a movement which had as its primary focus young people who were already within the church (Senter 2004: 48). The shift from outreach to the more inward focus of organisations such as Christian Endeavour can be seen in the 1861 book *Christian Nurture* in which Bushnell (1861: 10) wrote that “all children should grow up Christian and not know themselves as anything else.” The tension between youth ministry as inward focused and outward focused is discussed later in this chapter.

These societies and groups were categorized as “youth work” and were initially left largely to individuals and organizations (known as para-church organizations), leading to the development of a dichotomy between organized youth work and the more formal Christian Education (catechesis). Nel (2000: 58) describes the distinction which developed as “undefined and unjustified” and notes that while history may explain how this distinction came to be, one should not use history to “maintain or defend them.”

From 1936 to the 1950s, local congregations became more proactive in their involvement in youth work, forming Sunday evening Christian fellowship groups which were based on the principles of Christian education (Strommen & Hardel 2000: 192). In this approach, youth work was not abdicated to parachurch organizations but fell directly under the supervision of local church committees. While programs differed in various denominations and churches; most followed five key areas: faith, witness, outreach, citizenship and fellowship (Strommen & Hardel 2000: 193). In the 1950’s the fellowship groups began to decline. Older youth outgrew the programme and criticisms were raised about the programs’ heavy emphasis on the intellectual aspects of youth ministry e.g. debate and discussion.

The *Youth for Christ* movement of the 1960’s “introduced musical and preaching styles reflective of popular culture” (Senter III 2001: xii). Clark (Senter III 2001: 82) refers to Jim Rayburn of Young Life and Jack Hamilton of Youth for Christ as pioneers in the beginnings of modern youth ministry.

In the 1970’s, church youth ministry as we know it today began to take form. Churches became increasingly aware of the impact of parachurch organisations in the lives of young people and began to incorporate their models and approaches into their congregations.
The approach was more holistic than the educational models of ministry that preceded it. The new approach to youth ministry recognised young people as a part of the present church rather than an entity of the future. It gave young people a voice in the church and focused not only on the educational component of youth ministry but also on other elements of ministry such as missions, worship and service. While the era of youth ministry did not have a standardised plan of organising youth work (Strommen & Hardel 2000: 195), certain foundational principles were widely embraced:

1. Youth are full laity and treated as such
2. Designed locally reflect unique local needs
3. Person-centred rather than programme centred
4. Youth and adults are partners share leadership responsibilities
5. Youth live in a world with persons who need ministry

A more comprehensive youth ministry somewhat reduced the traditional dichotomy between youth work and catechesis. However, the programmatic approach led to what Clark (Senter III 2001: 83) refers to as “a parachurch programme under the structural umbrella of the local parish ... a debilitating flaw in church youth ministry.”

During this period, it became common for churches to appoint Youth Pastors to the dedicated role of undertaking youth ministry. Senter (2001: 115) describes the introduction of the youth group and the Youth Pastor as the expansion of discontinuity and specialisation in what he sees as the “schooling approach” to youth and children’s ministry.

2.3.2. Biblical Perspective on Youth and Children

There is a strong scriptural basis for emphasising the importance of the role of children and young people within the community of faith. Throughout scripture, young people are present and participating in the community of God’s people where they are acknowledged and where they are not. Nel (2005: 10) writes that the Bible is “a book about God and his dealings with people... children and other young people are essentially a part of these people.” In certain instances, the young are explicitly mentioned in the narrative of God’s covenant people. They were present at the sacrifices offered to God (1 Samuel 1: 4). Their role at the annual Passover Meal (Exodus 12) was not as passive observers and certainly not as outsiders, rather the participation of the youngest person present was central to the retelling of the defining story. Nel (2005: 11) notes that children and youth “share in God’s blessings when the covenant is sealed and people start living from the fullness of the caring grace of God.” The Psalms emphasise the importance of children, expressing God’s creation of the unborn child...
(Psalm 139), the presence of God’s moral law at conception (Psalm 51: 7), God’s involvement in the birthing process (Psalm 22: 9) and blessings over children (Psalm 144: 12). God does not wait for adulthood to call people to fulfil God’s purpose for them in the world. Biblical figures such as Jeremiah, Samson, Paul and John are all called before their birth (Jeremiah 1: 5; Judges 13: 2-7; Galatians 1: 5, Luke 1: 13-17, 44). The unborn child is protected by law (Exodus 21: 22-23) and angels announce the birth of certain children (Exodus 18, Luke 1: 5-17, Luke 1: 26-38). Samuel is a boy when he hears and proclaims the message of God to Eli. God’s hand is at work sparing the life of the infant Moses in the reeds (Exodus 2: 1- 10) and the boy Ishmael in the desert (Genesis 21: 17-21). Nel (2005: 11) points out that David and Daniel were both likely to have been in their early teen years in the narrative of scripture. In the gospels, Jesus demonstrates a sincere concern for children. When the disciples try to usher children away from the presence of Christ, he admonishes them and insists that the children should be allowed to come to him (Matthew 19: 14). Jesus uses a child rather than an adult as the ultimate example of the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 18: 3) – a statement likely to surprise and challenge listeners culturally accustomed to thinking of children as inferior. He promises a great reward for anyone who meets the physiological needs of a child with even a glass of water (Matthew 10: 42) and on the other hand gives caution of severe punishment to anyone who might cause a child to sin (Matthew 18: 6). The image of Jesus approaching the bedside of a dead child and coaxing her with the words “little girl, get up” (Luke 9: 54) is yet another image of Christ’s tender care for little ones. These well-known gospel accounts are indeed good news for children and young people, but it must be noted that “it is not true that Jesus loves children and therefore brings about something new that has not been there before” (Nel 2005: 12). In the incarnation, Jesus reveals in a new and tangible way the truth that has existed all along – the triune God loves children and expects God’s people to value and care for them. The early church also demonstrates that youth are valued and used by God. The participation of children in a prayer meeting is explicitly mentioned (Acts 21: 5). The unmarried daughters – likely young – of Philip the Evangelist in Caesarea had all received and were practising the gift of prophecy (Acts 21: 9). Furthermore, children are directly addressed in the rules for family life (Ephesians 6: 4). Even more radically, their fathers are warned not to act in such a way as to exasperate their children. The early church was counter-cultural in offering a view of young people that took seriously their value, dignity and role as a part of the faith community. As seen in the references above, God is involved in the lives of young people, and young people are explicitly involved in the unfolding of God’s plan. Furthermore, one can be certain that
young people are included in the narrative and message of scripture even when not explicitly mentioned.

2.3.3. The Purpose of Youth Ministry

This discussion on the objective of youth ministry acknowledges that youth ministry is more a process than a product. Dean & Foster (1998: 34) describe it as “an ongoing state of readiness, not a task with a beginning and an end.” Nevertheless, there is certainly a purpose and a variety of objectives in youth ministry which may be explored. It may be helpful to begin the description of the objective or purpose of youth ministry by asserting what the purpose is not. Youth ministry is not undertaken merely for the survival of the denomination or an investment in the future church (Nel 2005: 63). Sadly, in many local contexts, it has been reduced to such. Little (1968: 15) described this phenomenon as the “future church heresy.” Guder (1998: 268) writes that “the missional ecclesiology must clearly identify and resist all attempts to equip the church merely for its maintenance and security.” Youth ministry is ministry. As such, it is firmly rooted in God’s covenantal dealings with God’s people and God’s mission to the world through the church. The purpose of youth ministry is ultimately the same as the purpose of the church. Nel (2005: 70) states it as follows – “the goal of youth ministry is the Shalom Jahwe within society.” God longs to bring all people into a restored relationship with God, with one another and with creation. God comes to the world through the church by making disciples who in turn make disciples. The objective in youth ministry is to include young people in all that the church does to fulfil God’s mission by making disciples who in turn make disciples. As stated by Nel (2005: 64) – “God’s purpose for the congregation is also God’s purpose with the youth as an essential part of the congregation.” To be mindful of serving Christ with a missional perspective is to remedy the tendency of youth ministry to uphold personal salvation as the primary focus in the goal setting of youth ministry (Nel 2005: 69). While personal salvation and discipleship of the individual are not unimportant, these are brought into focus only from the perspective of the community and of a Kingdom where justice and righteousness has been restored to all. Dean & Foster (1998:17) state that “adolescents have their mission fields as well as we do, and they look to the church for guidance in how to be the person God calls them to be – both in and in spite of their own culture.” They later comment that in instances where youth ministry has been reduced to life skills training, “we have failed to enlist them in the missionary movement of Jesus Christ.” Nel (2005: 66) suggests that the first goal for youth ministry is participation “as a part of the local church, in building up the local church- in unity with the
will and plan for God for every congregation in its context.” Said differently, the purpose is to “train the youth to be a part of the local church that makes a difference” (Nel 2005: 74-75). The goal for youth ministry differs from the goals of other forms of ministry only in its focus on the involvement of young people. Nel (2005: 67) furthermore quotes the following goals for youth ministry as suggested by Potts (1977: 49 – 53) while commenting that each one of them would be equally commendable if applied to the goals of ministry with adults:

- “To lead the youth to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ;
- To meaningfully challenge the youth with the message of the Bible concerning their own experiences;
- To help the youth think seriously and constructively about the consequences of God’s word;
- To train the youth to study the Bible enthusiastically, and to act self-reliantly according to the basic matters emerging from it;
- To guide the youth through experiences which will help them to evaluate their insights and develop a ‘Christ-centred view of life’;
- To help the youth to honestly and openly deal with matters concerning the relationship of faith and reason.”

The following description of the objective of youth ministry by Dean (2002: Kindle 750) resounds with the list of objectives given above - “to help young people grow faith mature enough that they can use their faith – their assumption about who God is and how God works in the world – to discern and execute faithful Christian action as disciples of Jesus Christ.”

Spiritual maturity is an important outcome in the endeavour to minister to young people. Although spiritual growth is an ongoing journey rather than an attainable goal, Senter (1997: 125) offers a helpful description mature adolescent faith as “that stage in his or her relationship to God when he or she is capable and willing to allow biblical truth to shape his or her values, decisions and actions.”

The apostle Paul describes the process of attaining spiritual maturity in Ephesians 4: 12 – 14: “… to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.”
This text reminds us that youth ministry is a platform which is “equipping teenagers with a grid of biblical truth and Christian teaching through which they can sift out the propaganda and deceit of the culture to make wise decisions about their lives” (Robbins 2004: 10782). Nel (2015) offers his conviction that “our understanding of salvation as decision-making rather than disciple-making has not done the job.” A simplistic understanding of youth ministry as leading young people to Christian conversion without promoting the development of Christian maturity results in our missing the Kingdom perspective of life in its fullness. Discipling of young people is “about celebrating initiation, giving guidance on a road of fulfilment in life, and facilitating discernment on the journey” (Nel 2015b: 11 pages). Dean & Foster (1998: 50) approach the matter from a United Methodist perspective in grounding the process of discipleship in the concept of sanctifying grace: “We must work out what it means to place sanctifying grace at the centre of youth ministry. Sanctifying grace is the gift of the Holy Spirit who enters us, dwells among us and makes it possible for Christ to enter the world through us.” Stated differently - “God-bearing youth ministry stops at nothing short of holiness, perfect love, robust and unapologetic Christian maturity, the setting apart of persons in community for transparent witness to Jesus Christ” (Dean & Foster 1998: 51).

The emphasis on spiritual growth of the individual is important in the discussion about the purpose of youth ministry, but Nel (2005: 65) notes that such an emphasis frequently lacks insight into the approach where “we, as a congregation, grow together.” His definition of youth ministry borrows the prepositions used by Little (1968: 17) – ministry to, with and through young people. Spiritual maturity as a goal in youth ministry is not just about adults facilitating maturity and growth in young people but vice versa as well. Nel (2005: 65) writes: “They may be young and as such their contributions may be less substantial than those of older and more experienced members. Their contributions are certainly not worth less because they are for some reason considered to be a lesser part of the whole than those who are older.”

While the focus of youth ministry is not primarily about the development of the individual, it is worth taking note of the ways in which effective youth ministry may impact on the lives of individual adolescents in various spheres of their being. A longitudinal analysis by Smith (1999: 553 – 580) revealed “assets” or life skills that young people are more likely to have when they are religious. These assets, published in the paper Political Psychology 20 (1999) 553 – 580 are as follows:
• They are less likely to commit suicide
• They are less sexually active
• Less likely to drink alcohol or abuse drugs
• Less likely to be arrested
• They stay in school longer
• They are healthier and feel better about themselves
• They are more likely to volunteer than their non-religious counterparts

2.3.4. Youth Ministry as Missional
The church is missional, therefore youth ministry, as an integral part of the church, is missional. Every effort in youth ministry is undertaken with an aim to fulfil that which the church is sent by God to do within and outside of the church. Discussions around youth ministry may sometimes revolve around a perceived tension between evangelism and discipleship, otherwise phrased, between fellowship and mission. One overhears conversations with questions such as “shall we nurture our own youth or shall we focus our attention on youth outside the church?” There has long been a tension between “preservation” and “propagation” (Nel 2015: 116). From the inception of formal youth ministry some organisations (e.g. Christian Endeavour) focussed on the nurture of young people who had grown up in Christian homes while others focussed on evangelism. Evangelising young people outside of the church is an important part of the missional church. Clark (Senter III 2001: 83) points out the vast gulf between churched and unchurched people in today’s society. Senter III (2001: xiii) describes a continuum with a “come” (inward focused) approach on the one end and a “go” (outward focused) approach on the other and states that “the majority of youth ministries find themselves clustered at one end or the other.” Black (Senter III 2001: 46) endorses an educational base for youth ministry where the primary focus is on “teaching youths and others to know and obey all that Christ commanded.” Others emphasise evangelism. Nel (2015b) invites his readers to imagine disciple-making as a process that involves the development and growth of the individual while simultaneously calling him or her to do what disciples do – make disciples. Nel (2015: 114) comments that “technically there should be no distinction (and certainly no choice) between the intensive and extensive “building up” operations: they are always one and happen simultaneously.” He writes that “disciple-making is evangelising in its very core” (Nel 2015b). The church which ceases to look outward ceases to be the church. The identity
of the church is that of one sent by God into the world. Therefore, to neglect those still in the
world is to be unfaithful to the nature and purpose of the church. The outward focus on the
world is “what marks the congregation to be a community of Jesus Christ” (Nel 2015: 114)
and the “hallmark of the true church is a deep empathy with those who are still outside” (Nel
2015: 115). Osmer (cf Zcheile 2012: 34) captured one key emphasis in the approach to
formation adopted by leaders with a missional mindset – they “were more open to the
cultures of people not currently in the church.” He places the practice of formation not
squarely within Christian Education, but within the missional approach to church leadership.
He writes of formation not as something which the congregation “does to others” but as a
critical process which the congregation itself must undergo to reach the surrounding culture.
Osmer (Zcheile: 2012: 49) differentiates between primary missional formation in which the
congregation is “taking form ‘in the Spirit’” and secondary missional formation whereby the
transformed congregation shapes and forms the spirituality of its participants. As Callahan
(1987: 125) writes, “whenever the church is in the world, God is in the church.” Zcheile
(2012: 18) writes that “we find our missional identity not in our ascent out of the world but
rather God’s descent into the world in Christ.” Nel (2015b) states that “to reduce salvation
to decision-making rather than disciple-making results in “shallow, even superficial,
relationships to Christ.” A church which has emphasised the “come” over “sent” risks
developing "a club mentality." (Senter III 2001: 97). Holmsbee (2007: Kindle 557) writes of
his fear that young people may live within the realm of youth ministry throughout
adolescence and yet “miss the most important aspect of their own restoration – that they can
be used by God to restore others.” Dean & Foster (1998: 64) assert that “God has utmost
confidence in young people’s ability to change the world, not to mention the church, and not
only invites them but expects them to do so.” There is in particular great opportunity for
young people to be witnesses of the kingdom through acts of service, as developmentally
adolescents “have a specific inclination to a service-oriented life” according to Nel (cf Senter III

2.3.5. Youth Ministry as Inclusive
The church is in service of God’s Kingdom in the world for all people, including young
people. The responsibility of the church to young people has been described as follows:
“Youth ministry, then, is not an appendage of the body, it is rather an expression of the whole
body caring for a specific group. Adolescents need an adult community who will love them
appropriately and with great care. This is the call of the church. Young adolescents need
several second families, and middle adolescents need a safe place to explore peer relationships while knowing that there are many others in the wings committed and available to them. Older adolescents need to know that they matter to the other adults in the community. Youth ministry is everybody’s job!” (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 1332-1336)

Harkness (1998:41 cf Seibel & Nel 2010) writes that “ever since the development of Christian faith communities in the Post-Pentecost era of Christianity, there has been a consciousness that such communities need to encourage and embody a genuine intergenerationalism.” Nel (2000: 77) succinctly puts it like this – “Youth are not only partly the congregation’s responsibility; they are wholly so.” Adolescents are to be valued – as human beings, as objects of God’s love and as an “integral part of the community of faith” (Nel 2005: 17). In discussions regarding young people, the church must take care not to see young people as a problem to be solved but as members of the community who are both valuable and vulnerable. Nel (2005: 78) writes that “even though they are unique and have a distinct character, they are not apart from the rest” (Nel 2005: 78). This concept forms a part of a greater principle of inclusivity on all levels of congregational functioning. As Dick (2007: 92) comments, “We is the word spoken most frequently in vital congregations.” A us-vs-them mentality in congregations with regard to young and old (or any other polarity in community life) is unhelpful and in opposition to the values of mutual love and dignity for all. Nel (2015: 47) describes brokenness and disunity as “detrimental to the plan”, referring to the church as God’s plan for healing and restoration of all creation.

McLaren (cf Jones 2001: 216) challenges the idea of youth ministry as essentially different from ministry to adults, noting that people have historically been considered adults from the time of puberty. He describes youth ministry as “pastoral work at a critically important, pivotal, dynamic period of adulthood – young adulthood.” Young people are also not to be seen merely in terms of their future value, as if the purpose of ministering to their needs is an “investment policy” for the continued investment of the church. Nel (2015: 28) comments: “Such churches are concerned for their own survival and are not service oriented. This attitude is the most apparent in its attitudes toward youth ministry. Survival-oriented churches regard young people as an investment for the sake of the future of the given institution.” This does not imply that the future is not taken into account in youth ministry. Indeed, Peterson (1989: 47 cf Seibel & Nel 2010) writes that “if we are going to learn a life of holiness in the mess of history, we are going to have to prepare for something intergenerational and think in centuries.” The focus is not on maintenance and preservation but on mission. As Clark writes, “the measure of success of a church is “the willingness and
ability of a church to fully assimilate growing adolescents into the adult faith community” (Senter III ed Clark 2001: 84).

Youth Ministry is not an isolated “ministry” to be added to the other modes of ministry (Nel 2015: 71) or a sub-category in one of these modes. Rather, youth ministry is integral in each and every mode of ministry. Young people are not an afterthought, but are incorporated into every mode of ministry within the congregation. Describing the modes of ministry as “Christian Practices”, Dean & Foster (1998: 109) describe them as “basic to ministry with adolescents.” Nel (2005: 17) notes that youth ministry “often lacks a real ecumenical perspective and respect for the larger corpus.” He regards an understanding of God’s communal dealings with people as non-negotiable in youth ministry. This does not mean that a differentiated approach should not be made available in the church’s ministries to young people or that young people will never be taken aside for ministry which is specialized to their needs. Nel (2000: 66) comments that the principle of “together with cannot and will not always imply a physical together with, yet the principle always applies.” In another article, Nel (2005: 11 – 12) writes: “There is an age-specific and need-oriented nature in the care of God. He is at the same time inclusively and specifically involved. His care is simultaneously holistic and differentiated in nature. Being his faith community is to get in step with him in caring holistically (inclusively) and in a differentiated way. Any given faith community is called to minister inclusively and at the same time be very specific and focused as to age and needs.” This also means that the contributions of young people are taken seriously and that like any other member, they are expected to play a part. Youth are not to be seen as “objects” but as “agents” of youth ministry (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 496). Seibel & Nel (2010) refer to the members of Generation X, writing that “the gifts with which God has endowed the members of this generation need to be permitted to gain expression to the benefit of all.” Dean & Foster (1998: 17) express it as follows: “Youth ministry is not limited to what the church has to offer youth. It includes what the youth offer us as well: a way of being “church” that takes seriously the search for God that is so acute during adolescence but so necessary for us all.” Nel (2005: 120) writes that “the congregation should never think of the faith life and experiences of the children and adolescents as something separate from the faith life and experiences of adult members.” Rather, the youth “should be integrated into the life of the church” (Ludwig 1988: 37; Osmer 1996: 197). An important underlying principle in the inclusion of children is what Nel (2005: 127) refers to as the “equi-human approach” to youth ministry. This method implies not only a love for children but “an appreciation of their humanity.” Nel (2005: 11) reminds us that “people do not grow into being loved by
Those ministering to children acknowledges each child as equal to adults in value and status. Nel (2005: 127) comments that “to be ahead of someone as regards age is not to be superior in humanness.” This concept leads to an atmosphere of mutual respect between children and adults rather than one of superiority and subordination. It entails an attitude of “unconditional acceptance of who you are and where you are” (Nel 2005: 129). The doctrine of anthropology upholds this perspective of children. This premise is so important that Nel (2005: 129) asserts that “all people in youth ministry should be tested as to their awareness of the equi-human approach.” The integration and inclusion of children in the local church is not only a matter of spiritual awareness but the practical application as well. The financial stewardship of the congregation ought to reflect this investment, with a healthy budget allocated to youth ministry in the church. Nel (2005: 193) comments that “it can be safely stated that the budget for youth ministry is the most honest barometer for the degree of integration of youth ministry in the local church.” Furthermore, true investment in youth ministry will be a willingness to include young people fully in the life of the church, particularly in its structures of power and decision-making. To offer effective youth ministry, “families, congregations and communities must do more than love their youth. They must also demonstrate that they value them” (Strommen & Hardel 2000: 226). This may entail a willingness to change. Seibel & Nel (2010) refer to McManus’ (2001: 31) chilling statement that “many churches while keeping their traditions, have lost their children.” Thompson (2003: 162 cf Seibel & Nel 2010) writes that “if a congregation’s members truly consider their corporate witness of primary importance and intend for it to endure beyond their own lifespan, they must be willing to set aside their personal preferences about church to enable ‘a new ethos to be born.’” The tendency of young people to embrace and initiate change is one of their greatest gifts to congregations. Kraft (2005:297 cf Seibel & Nel 2010) notes that “whenever and wherever the church has turned from being venturesome and retreated into static forms of expression it has lost its dynamic.” Seibel & Nel (2010) note that the meaningful integration and incorporation of young people into faith communities has not taken place effectively, writing that “Gen Xers have faced limits in the degree to which they are able to bring their gifts, experiences and insight to bear on the way in which their faith tradition is expressed.” Furthermore, they write that “the marginalisation experienced by Gen Xers within many established churches... has prevented them from becoming effective bearers of the church’s tradition.”

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2.3.6. Youth Ministry as Relational

Relationships are crucial in every ministry to people of every age and generation. After all, our “scriptural context for growing disciples is through relationships” (Nel 2015; Ogden 2003: 42) and “no believer can receive, experience and enjoy the fullness of life that Christ gives without others” (Nel 2015: 196). Koinonia is one of the ways that God comes to God’s people and through the congregation to the world. The triune God is relational by nature as Trinity, as Nel (2015: 136) puts it– “otherness is constitutive of God’s Trinitarian life.” Gittins’ (2008: 161) words ring true when he writes that “unless there is some person of faith, then there is no faith; if hope is not carried by real people, then hope does not exist or has already died.” The South African context itself reminds us that this is true, where the well-known concept of Ubuntu is emphasised in popular culture through the common phrase “umuntu ngumunutu ngabantu” which roughly translated means “a person is a person through others” (Nel 2015). This relational emphasis is even more critical in youth ministry, where the brains of adolescents are uniquely “wired” for growth through relationships and where the need for relationships is high. Nel (2005: 17–18) writes that “during man’s youth, in which relationships are of cardinal importance, it is essential that youth ministry should have an ecclesiological/ somatic foundation. In relationships with others, the youth grow spiritually and learn that they are a part of a serving community of believing person.” Another African proverb would remind us that “it takes a village to raise a child” (Senter III 2001: 121). Our grounding in the relational God and the koinonia of the congregation keep us away from a shallow emphasis on relationships for their own sake. Dean & Foster (1998: 27) assert that “using relationships for the sake of meeting developmental needs represents a misguided concept of church.” In recognition of the relational needs of adolescents, it is critical that the relational aspects of youth ministry are taken seriously. It is important for churches to approach the use of program-centered models of ministry with a cautious awareness that programmes should never replace relational ministry. Programs can offer an appealing alternative to the costly and time-intensive requirements of individual investment (Nel 2015), but much is lost when churches forego relationship and personal attention to the individual in the process of ministry. This does not mean that programs are undesirable. Dean & Foster (1998: 26) affirm the value of programs “as long as these programs integrate young people into the overall mission of the church and build significant relationships between youth and Christian adults and peers.”
i. Relationships with Peers

Peer relationships are important in youth ministry and should be encouraged where they are appropriate and positive in their influence. Peer relationships in early adolescence provide a “mirror” for the developing adolescent. Clark (Senter III 2001: 86) describes the pattern whereby young adolescents form groups or clusters of three to eight friends similar to themselves which reinforces the self-concept beginning to take form. He describes the tremendous power and pressure of the peer group at this stage (Senter III 2001: 87). Dean and Foster (1998: 127) describe a heart-warming account of a group of adolescents whose “bonds of friendship... established with one another [were] clearly grounded in Christ.” Black (Senter III 2001: 50) comments on the value of peer relationships in the school setting based on the fact that these are the places where adolescents spend most of their time. He stresses the importance of “training youths to take the lead in reaching and discipling their peers.” He describes ministry among peers as an ideal training ground for developing young leaders. The “friendship evangelism” model has been widely embraced. Boshers (1998: 95) states that “there can be no outreach without Christian students who care for their non-Christian friends.” Holmsbee (2007: Kindle 373) notes that “friendship evangelism calls students to live like Jesus in the context of their relationships.” While maintaining a place for peer evangelism, Clark (Senter III 2001: 92) notes that there are limitations to this approach as well as developmental limitations for the adolescents themselves who need “the freedom to walk tall and occasionally fall down.”

ii. Relationships with Adults

Black (Senter III 2001: 52) asserts that it is “a sad youth who does not have wholesome, positive interactions with those outside his peer group.” Nel (2000: 60) stresses the importance of involving adults in the religious instruction of young people as he writes that “one cannot deny that youth ministry always has to be pedagogical in nature. The older people who live in a knowing and loving relationship with God has, after all, lived longer in this relationship.” This understanding takes fully into account the equi-human approach to youth ministry and maintains that youth are of equal status before God in spite of their need for guidance from adults. Adults are equipped to offer such guidance on a different level to that which is offered by peers. Their life experience provides a background to their ministry which “is important as a source of wisdom and equips them well to coach and mentor their younger brothers and sisters in the faith” (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 4200-4204). Oestreicher (2005: 33)
points out that “a seasoned adult can bring maturity to a youth ministry that younger adults may lack.” This concept is well described as follows - “Contrary to the popular stereotype that adolescents abandon adults and turn to peers for affirmation and advice, these studies provided overwhelming evidence that students in every grade level between grades 5 and twelve prefer adult support” (Strommen & Hardel 2000: 217). This does not mean that there will not be significant challenges to be overcome in the pastoral relationships between adults and adolescents. Robbins (2004: Location 5995) articulates a part of the challenge: “Youth ministry is cross-cultural ministry. It requires people of one culture (adults) – with one set of values and morals regarding fashion, leisure, volume of music and so on – to cross over into the world of another culture (teenagers) with its distinct language, customs, arts and preferences. Sometimes the gulf is wider and sometimes narrower, but the gulf always exists.” The vocabulary used in the church should reflect an understanding of “youth within the congregation not youth and the congregation” (Nel 2005: 79). Nel (Senter III 2001: 62) comments on the need for relationships in Christian education as he notes that “in church, children and adolescents learn in direct relationship to the level of care they experience.” Integration is not merely about including young people but about a willingness to accommodate their needs and experience in every ministry in the church. For example, in the ministry of worship, “it is not simply enough to throw youth into predominantly adult-oriented worship experience and hope that they catch on.” From a somatic departure point, one might consider the nature of the female body after conception. The expectant woman’s body adjusts itself in numerous ways to accommodate and nurture the growing foetus. For the church to mimic the human body in its reception and care for the next generation would entail a willingness to extend itself for the provision of nurture and protection and with an openness to change. This agogical willingness is necessary for the inclusion of adolescents for whom change is a constant reality of their life stage in transition from children to adults. As Nel (2005: 23) writes, “nowhere should people who are changing feel as at home as in a congregation... The congregation motivates and facilitates change. Here, the fifteen year old sees change in the sixty year old and vice versa.” Similarly, Heflin (2009: 38) notes that “relationships that foster spiritual maturity work both ways. Just as students benefit from their relationships with teachers, so teachers benefit from their relationships with students.” Arthur (2007: 71) writes “Most of the key adults they [youth] know are simply too busy to grace them with the dignity of attention, too fragmented themselves to listen to what youth are saying. When an adult takes them seriously, young people are validated. They’re much more likely to pay attention to what that grown-up has to say, and they’re more likely to stay
connected to the church than if no adults in the congregation had taken the time to get to know them.” The importance of connecting young people into meaningful relationships with others on the Christian journey is not merely a response to a developmental need but also a theological conviction about the nature of our faith as relational and communal. As Osmer (1996: 203) writes, “there is a long-standing suspicion in the Reformed tradition of a preoccupation with a personal spirituality.” Society’s individualistic focus may easily translate into an individualized understanding of religion. It is important in youth ministry for young people to grasp that the Christian faith is not exclusively a matter between God and the individual self, but a covenant between God and God’s people in community. This understanding is reached naturally when one comes to faith through meaningful relationships with others. When churches are not willing to extend themselves in order to integrate and connect young people to the church as a whole, “the children and adolescents are deprived. They miss the enrichment of the whole of which they are a part because of God’s work in Christ” (Nel 2005: 120). The church has a responsibility to the young people and to itself to connect young people to relationships “that will last them beyond their teenage years” (De Vries 2004: 56). Dean (1998: 130) describes the role of ministering to young people through relationships (mentoring) as a “privilege that comes with profound responsibility” because “developmentally, youth are capable of extraordinary commitment to someone who believes in them” (Dean 1998: 48). There is a responsibility to reciprocate with faithfulness when such relationships have been formed. The role that significant adults play in the life of a young person is most meaningful when characterized by humility and authenticity. Writing to Youth Pastors on the topic of authenticity, Robbins (2004: Kindle 2524) notes that “one of the risks of ministry is transparency, allowing students to see our hearts – the good, the bad and the ugly.” Like the apostle Paul, the incarnational adult might say through their actions that “we loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel but our lives as well” (1 Thessalonians 2: 8). Richards (1978: 139 – 140) described the relationship between mentor and young person as one in which “the adult admits and expresses his equality with youth as persons by encouraging a mutual self-revelation and in which the youth and adult each learn to trust the other with his thoughts and feelings and experiences.” There are boundaries to consider, however, when it comes to self-disclosure and transparency. Robbins (2004: Kindle 2852) warns against sharing in such a way that it is akin to “dumping on a youth group a load they shouldn’t be asked to bear.” Osmer (1996: 204) describes the ideal mentoring relationship as one in which the young person “can learn at the deepest level, identifying with the mentor and internalizing him or her as a meaningful
inner figure.” He points out that in such a relationship, “the piety of the mentor is more important than the particular knowledge that he or she hands on” – in other words deep learning happens in relationship through following a sincere example characterized by openness and authenticity. Emphasizing the importance of the adult-adolescent relationship, Senter III (1986: 201 – 203) describes youth ministry as follows: “Youth ministry begins when a Christian adult finds a comfortable way of entering a student’s world; youth ministry happens as long as a Christian adult is able to use his or her contact with a student to draw that student into a maturing relationship with God. Dean and Foster (1998: 37) describe adolescents as needing “faithful adults to represent the gospel, to shore up their faith and to guide them in mission.” It is crucial that the focus remains on God. Developmentally and socially young people need relationships with adults. What sets youth ministry apart is the purpose of that relationship … the adult does not only form a relationship with a young person but takes care to use that relationship for the purpose of faith formation. As Robbins (2004: 11457) describes it, “building relationships with the intention of building disciples.” Young people need the church to facilitate enduring relationships with significant Christian adults. Heflin (2009: 93) writes that “teens need mature spiritual friends who will love and guide them through the tumultuous years of adolescence. The Youth Pastor is integral to this process but she must not attempt it alone.”

iii. Selecting Adult Volunteers for Relational Youth Ministry

The recruitment and selection of adult volunteers for youth ministry in the church should be taken seriously. Nel (2005: 130) suggests that the selection committee might comprise of parents, the youth themselves, church leadership representatives and if applicable the Youth Pastor. It is worth noting some of the potential barriers to the effective identification and recruitment of adult volunteers in youth ministry. Heflin (2009: Kindle 1860-1877) suggests several potential barriers:

1. Self-reliant Youth Pastor may give the impression help is not needed
2. Failure to convey a compelling vision for why youth workers are needed
3. Fear of rejection when asking for volunteers
4. Young people themselves objecting to particular adults for various reasons

Nel (2015b) emphasises the importance of being over doing with regard to the selection of those suited to making disciples in youth ministry. He goes on to describe a learning attitude and awareness of one’s own brokenness as pre-requisites for this task. Dean & Foster (1998:
41) comment that “who I am with youth, and not what I do with them, is what they will remember twenty years from now.” Black (cf Senter III 2001: 48-49) reminds selection committees that it is not acceptable to simply “enlist someone who looks young, talks young, thinks young, or is simply willing to work with a church’s teenagers.” Heflin (2009: Kindle 1806) reminds us of the following - “the task for Christian youth ministry is too important for us to settle for any warm body to fill a position of service. We need standards to guide our selection of those who work in our ministries. To determine these standards, we must reflect on the job that needs to be done, the skills required and the giftedness of people.” Goetz (1977: 283 – 285) suggests the following qualifications for adult leaders which selection committees can keep in mind as they pay attention to the formation of a leadership team for youth ministry:

- “A confession of salvation and a radiant Christian life
- A sincere love for and sympathetic understanding of the Bible
- A good basic knowledge of the Bible
- Available time and the ability to work hard
- Faithful and dependable
- Maturity – spiritual and emotional
- Willingness to learn
- The ability to give pastoral care to the youth
- Awareness of the total programme of the local church for the youth”

There is a need for those ministering to young people to receive training in this regard. Commenting on the importance of training in every kind of ministry, Nel (2015: 157) writes that “training the congregation means investing in people in every sense of the word.” Nel (2015: 158) describes, as an example the role that is played by the catechist who through Christian education in the local church works closely with the parents to “lead the child to a daily confession with his or her mouth and heart.” Nel (2015: 158) asks the question “how are they to do it if they are not trained by the “theologian” in their midst?”

Dean & Foster (1998: 16) refer to research by Scales (1995: 5) in asserting that Christian youth leaders “are more likely to desire training in any aspect of their ministry than their counterparts in other church vocations.” Heflin (2009: Kindle 1839) notes the importance of spiritual development as a critical part of equipping adults to minister to youth. Nel (2015b: 8
also comments on the importance on discipling not only the youth but the adults (and parents) involved in youth ministry as well.

iv. Relationships with Parents

For many young people who fall under the responsibility of the local congregation, adult volunteers in the church may be “the only Christian family they ever know” (De Vries 2004: 79). An effective youth ministry can never rely solely on the ideal scenario whereby all parents within the community fulfil the role as partners in the spiritual development of their children. It may be that the majority of young people in any given community have received no religious instruction or modelling of faith in the home at all. Nel (2005: 20) comments of the thousands of children who are not born into traditional families or even into any kind of family connection and asserts that “these facts have to be taken fully into account in youth ministry.” Strommen (1979: 33) asserts that “the time when the church could accept that family relationships would supply the needs of children and adolescents, has passed for the foreseeable future.” However, in every instance where it is possible, churches must use the opportunity to work with parents and equip parents to play a leading role in the faith development of their children. It is widely noted that “the parent is the primary determinant of a person’s faith” (Curran 1980: 17). Nel (2015:201) comments that “parents should guide their children, by reason of their baptism, to follow Christ and help others to follow him.” It is inarguable that the faith development of children is first and foremost the responsibility of the parents who are also the most naturally equipped to do so. In the Shema of Israel (Deuteronomy 6: 4 - 9) the individuals entrusted to impress God’s commands upon the hearts of the children are those who are with the children in the routines of day to day life – relaxing at home, travelling from place to place, going to bed and waking up in the morning. Even in an era where family life is fractured, parents remain the people most likely to share these opportune moments in their day to day life together. Dean & Foster (1998: 78) describe a unique “unguarded psychological state” that is present in children’s interactions with their parents in the home. Nel (2005: 108) describes parents as the “primary mediators of salvation” in the lives of their children. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, “preached explicitly on the family’s duty to children, exhorting parents to attend diligently to the religious education of their youngsters” (Dean & Foster 1998: 78). It is widely acknowledged that his own faith formation was nurtured primarily through the devoted and disciplined discipleship efforts of his mother Susanna Wesley, who remained a mentor and advisor to him and to the Methodist movement throughout her life.
Youth ministry must take seriously the influence and role of families. The influence of the parent on the value system of a child “will exceed the influence of the youth worker on most occasions.” (Dunn & Senter 1997: 126). Parents are not only the primary bearers of the responsibility to minister to their children but are also uniquely equipped for this task. The intimate bonds characteristic of most family relationships are fertile ground for effective modelling and deep understanding. Nel (2005: 111-112) comments on the ability of parents to naturally differentiate among people of different age groups as is required for most aspects of family life and can be applied specifically to religious instruction. It is crucial that churches recognise the importance of families and therefore of their role in equipping parents for this responsibility. Black (Senter III 2001: 45) points out that “if we are to touch the lives of youths in significant ways, we must also touch the lives of those who are in their world of influence.” The church is called to correct the comment phenomenon whereby religion is often experienced as “a taboo subject in the home” (Nel 2005: 109; Strommen 1985: 135) and to help parents to recognise and accept their responsibility to nurture the faith development of their children at home. The church is also called to equip parents with the skills and confidence to carry out the task of leading their children to Christ and to rely on the guidance of the Spirit as they allow the concept of “raising children” to become synonymous with that of “making disciples.” Nel (2015: 158) writes that “an effective ministry to parents and by parents to young people is essential in developing a missional congregation.” Churches that ignore the role of parents miss the opportunity for “indispensable partners” in youth ministry. Nel (2005: 113) goes as far as to describe organised youth ministry as “almost a promise to parents that the rest of the membership will work within this partnership with the parents”, thus shifting the role of the church to that of supporting parents rather than replacing parents in the spiritual formation of their children. In spite of this critical role of parents in the lives and spiritual development of their children, there does come a time where adolescents naturally begin to distance themselves from their family of origin (De Vries 1994). During this time, the wider network of adult relationships available to young people maintains a continuous safe space for the development of faith with the guidance of a community of adults. Dean & Foster (1998: 80) describe that “the congregation as secondary family becomes a vital link in helping the youth mediate the transition from their place in their family of origin to their place in broader society.”
v. Relationship with Christ

The defining difference between Biblical discipleship and all other learning processes is in the relationship between the individual and Christ. Nel (2015: 194) notes that, especially in youth ministry and Sunday School classes, “being a pupil can be reduced to meaning the learning and knowing of facts.” He further comments that “the one who teaches his disciples is always more important than what is being taught about him... when the teaching of the congregation is reduced to the mere transmission of facts about god it is only, at most, only interesting to the verbally and intellectually gifted.” This reminder of the central relationship to be nurtured in ministry is as true for ministry with young people as for all people.

2.3.7. The Role of the Youth Pastor

Youth ministry “stands and falls with good leaders” (Nel 2000: 116). Young people have an exceptional capacity to follow which makes the following unsurprising: “Where there is leadership, the youth will be. To go against this natural “grain” of the youth and expect their loyalty in a local church with no youth leader is like blowing against the wind” (Nel 2005: 117). Leadership in terms of the spiritual gift (charismata) can be described as “the special ability or skill that God has given to certain members of the body of Christ to point out goals which are in line with God’s purpose, and to communicate these to others in such a way that they will work together freely and harmoniously to attain these gifts for the glory of God” (Nel 2015: 169). Power (cf Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 4668-4669) explains that clear and effective leadership may be even more crucial in youth ministries as it is in general church ministry: “As with most other ecclesiological communities, a youth group requires leadership. Given the ongoing intellectual, emotional, relational, and spiritual development that adolescents are experiencing, it is possible that the adult leadership in the youth community may need to function in more distinct, if not significant, roles than the adult leadership in an adult community.”

In many churches the primary adult devoted to the leadership of young people and the facilitation of discipling relationships between adults and youth is the Youth Pastor. It is widely acknowledged that there are certain stereotypes of Youth Pastors, for example “merely playing with teenagers” as described by Black (Senter III 2001: 51). Heflin (2009: 94) describes this role as follows:

“The Youth Pastor is a bridge spanning the chasm created by segregation of generations in the church and must model intergenerational connectivity through her relationships with people of all ages in the church”
The responsibility of the entire congregation for its young people is non-transferable (Nel 2005: 18) and a church which places the responsibility for its youth solely on the shoulders of a Youth Pastor has abdicated its responsibility and paid the price of a meaningful connection with its youth. One member of a particular congregation described her experience in the face of such a scenario - “We lost contact with that whole generation when we hired a seminarian to look after our youth” (Gribbon 1990: 68). Robbins (2004: Kindle 11589) describes the all too common unhealthy dynamic in which there is a Youth Pastor acclaimed as a charismatic leader and who connects well with key students, but who ultimately fails to “cultivate a team of adult leaders who can extend the web of relationships.”

Just as “the whole body expresses the ministry of Christ” (Nel 2015: 147) rather than leaving such a task to the offices or ordained church leadership, so too the whole body of believers in the community of faith share in the responsibility for ministry to young people. The view that a small representation of (paid) staff can operate on behalf of the rest of the congregation is not unique to youth ministry and is frequently seen in congregations in its attitude to the special offices. With reference to this way of thinking about ministry, Nel (2015: 148) states that both leaders and other members must “time and again be discouraged from the idea that the leaders should do the congregation’s work on the congregation’s behalf.” Farley (cf Dean & Foster 1998: 59) described this as the “clerical paradigm.” Nel (2015: 231) describes “a subject-object relationship within a situation where the special offices (the elders etc.) are emphasised at the expense of the ministry of each member.” His argument follows with a call to developing a subject-subject relationship with the assertion that “anything less clashes with what is essentially meant by developing an identity-driven missional local church” (Nel 2015: 231).

Nevertheless, the role of “special offices” officers in the church remains critical, as does the role of the Youth Pastor. Commenting on the enormity of the youth ministry task in light of the unprecedented challenges faced by young people today, Nel (2000: 118) writes that “in some social contexts in this country, the challenge is indeed so overwhelming that one can easily believe that only professionally trained people can remedy the matter.” The challenges of contemporary society have necessitated the need for trained specialist individuals dedicated to youth ministry in their congregations. His writing expresses hope that as youth ministry in churches continues to develop, professional youth leaders will become more emphasised “while retaining a place for the informal leader.” He notes that while the role of the volunteer youth leader is important, there is a striking difference between their ministry and “that of selected, gifted youth leaders” (Nel 2000: 117).
The responsibility is not only to put in place a genuinely called and appropriately trained individual in the role of Youth Pastor, but to ensure as much stability as possible in this appointment. As Dean (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 1143) puts it, “postmodern youth workers need to be aware that in a culture where few systems and relationships are trustworthy or stable, adolescents need to know that a Christian ministry designed to serve them will do all it can to ensure an experience of stability and health.”

While emphasizing the value of the full time Youth Pastor, one needs to be aware of the danger of what Powell (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: 4758) refers to as “the dominant stereotype of a strong and gifted leader who remains the driving force of his youth group.” Her point is not to discredit the importance of a Youth Pastor but to avoid allowing the youth ministry in a church to rely solely on the personality and gifting of one individual to the exclusion of ministry that facilitates whole-church involvement in youth ministry. Such scenarios may result in a cycle which De Vries (2008: 48) describes as the “superhero syndrome.” These are situations where churches that have had negative experiences with Youth Pastors begin to search for a Youth Pastor whom, it is hoped, will single-handedly resolve all problems in the church’s youth ministry by virtue of their unique gifts and personality. Churches with this approach become “a very toxic culture for youth workers.” Each new Youth Pastor brought into that environment experiences and replicates similar problems. That congregation becomes unable to retain Youth Pastors for any reasonable tenure which results in a disrupted and unsustainable ministry to the youth in these congregations and many of these Youth Pastors will leave youth ministry altogether after their “first overwhelming experience” (De Vries 2008: 48). The church which elevates its Youth Pastor to superhero status or which remains chronically disappointed in Youth Pastors unable to meet such an expectation may have forgotten that the role of a Youth Pastor is not to point to himself but to point “to the leadership, Lordship and Headship of Jesus Christ in and over his congregation” (Nel 2015: 166). When the role of the Youth Pastor is overstated, there is a gross understatement of Christ’s role in the ministry to young people in the congregation and through the congregation to the world.

The job description of the Youth Pastor will differ from one local church to another, but Stewart and Yeager (1987: 122 – 124 cf Benson & Senter 1987) offer a helpful basic worksheet for a full-time Youth Pastor:
• “recruitment of people who have the gift of working with the youth;
• Supplies, at the very least, a yearly evaluation of each member of the group working with the youth;
• Meets with workers individually and as a group
• Supports workers to draft personal goals in ministry and to reach those goals;
• Ensuring pastoral care of workers;
• Developing the curriculum;
• Developing a programme;
• Planning; and
• Maintaining relationships between the departments of youth ministry”

i. The Call to Youth Ministry

It is crucial that Youth Pastors have a clear calling for the specific vocation of youth ministry. Yaconelli (2005: 53) describes the call to youth ministry as “unmistakable, relentless and captivating.” Robbins (2004: Kindle 1554) offers the following reminder: Becoming a Youth Pastor is not a career choice, it is a vocational response to the same lord who told his disciples in John 15: 16 “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.” Oosterguaurd (cf Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 5135-5136) describes the importance of a call – “we all get to a place in ministry when we wonder why we are doing it, and unless you can give yourself a clear answer to that question, you will be out of ministry in double-quick time.” Nel (2005: 119) notes that “as in all ministries, calling is central to this ministry.” He writes: “Youth ministry itself is exhausting and draining enough. Without the support of a calling it cannot be sustained. Perhaps this is one reason for the large turnover of personnel in youth ministry” (Nel 2005: 120).

Niebuhr (1956: 46) describes four different calls of God that form a part to the call to ministry in the life of a person whom God has set apart for pastoral ministry:

• The call to be a Christian
• The secret call
• The providential call
• The ecclesiastical call

The call to be a Christian is the calling of God to all people, although not all respond. The “secret call” is what Patterson (Berkley ed 2000: 20 – 21) describes as an “intangible, inexplicable sense that God is calling us into pastoral work and a growing sense of holy
discontent with anything other than the pastoral vocation.” The providential call is “that dimension of vocation based on the combination of circumstances, experiences, talents and aptitudes” (Robbins 2004: Kindle 1716). Phrased differently, God’s equips the one whom God has called. Last but not least, the “ecclesiastical call” is a “confirmation by the Christian community that the call to pastoral ministry is genuine and recognised by the church.” (Niebuhr 1956: 46) The effort must be made to “confirm one’s calling and election” (1 Peter 1: 10).

Historically, the church has used the following criteria to evaluate a person’s calling – age, an inner sense of calling, demonstrated gifts for ministry, good health, character and doctrine (Oden 1983: 22; Robbins 2004: Kindle 1783 – 1810). Calling, then is not validated simply because one can express that he or she feels called. “Scripture nor tradition encourages lone individuals to simple declare themselves fit for ministry... it begins internally and is confirmed externally. It is not discerned in isolation” (Robbins 2004: 1812). This concept raises a question for the praxis of youth ministry in the context of the MCSA where presently no structures are in place for those who practice youth ministry to have their sense of call examined or affirmed by the church at large.

Even where one has discerned a calling to minister to young people, this may not automatically mean that one is called to the role of a full time Youth Pastor. Robbins (2004: Kindle 1706) describes a misconception that “there is only one way to respond to a youth ministry calling and that is to serve as a traditional local church Youth Pastor.” He goes on to describe many other avenues which may be a response to a calling to youth ministry, including vocational work in publishing, sports ministry, graphic design and more. A sincere call is not, in itself, enough to qualify a person for the tasks of youth ministry. Rather, comprehensive training is needed. Nel (2015: 195) writes with reference to every kind of ministry that “teaching and training is necessary for insight into and fulfilment of one’s calling.”

ii. Selection and Training of Youth Pastors
The process of selecting or recruiting a Youth Pastor ought to be one of careful and prayerful discernment (Nel 2015: 168). When undertaking the process of appointing a Youth Pastor, the congregation ought to take seriously the task of selecting an individual who is appropriately competent both for the specific task and to the general demands and tasks of church leadership.
Callahan (1983: 48) developed the following list of suggested traits to identify when selecting specific leaders for any specific tasks in the church from his experience in church consultations. While the list is not specific to youth ministry each aspect applies to the role of Youth Pastor as much as any other leadership position in the church. The list is as follows:

- Specific gifts and abilities that answer to the demands of the specific work
- General working abilities
- Sensitivity for human relations
- A commitment to the specific assignment
- A commitment to the specific congregation
- A commitment to the church’s duty in the world
- The necessary stamina for productivity, handling tension and dealing with conflict
- Adaptability to strong groups where relations are well developed
- A good self-image and strong characteristics

With more specific reference to the role of Youth Pastor, Nel (2000: 122) lists the following essential traits:

- Self-acceptance
- Integrity
- Sincerity
- Adaptability
- The courage to persevere
- A life adjusted to priorities

Describing the attributes that lead to trust in a church pastor, Nel (2015: 179) offers three attributes which are likewise essential in the case of a Youth Pastor – “He or she symbolizes God’s presence, represents the sacred, and genuinely cares.” Jones (2001: 225 – 226) discusses a variety of virtues that are applicable to leaders in the church and particularly for Youth Pastors. These virtues are maturity, political savvy, the ability to communicate and pray. With reference to church pastors but in a context also relevant to Youth Pastors, Carroll (2011: 45) describes two qualities as important in Christian leaders: “If anyone has authority as a pastor, it is because laity perceive him or her to be a reliable interpreter of the power and purposes of God in the context of contemporary society; and this involves both spiritual depth and expertise, not one without the other.” Training that will adequately
prepare a prospective or practicing Youth Pastor needs to offer a balance of theoretical and practical knowledge, along with a spiritual formation component that is not lacking in depth. Robbins (2004: Kindle 698) suggests that there is wisdom in avoiding “an approach to youth ministry training that is too short, too shallow, or too narrow. There is much to be learned beyond the covers of the latest youth ministry text, and we would do well to learn it” (Robbins 2004: Kindle 698). In describing the areas of specialization of church pastors, Heitink (1999: 320) states that “educational competence” is a prerequisite for those who specialize in religious instruction to young people. He names “pedagogics, didactics and agogics” as the basis of the required training. Theological training is critical if the youth ministry offered is to be of sound doctrine. Nel (2005: 14) asks - “Can anyone dare work with people as important as youth without theological training?” He asserts that “everyone working with the young and vulnerable should have a fair amount of theological training” (Nel 2005: 21). However as with all theologically endeavours and especially in practical theology it remains crucial to ensure that the training remains fully rooted in praxis and that the study of God’s work does not become a substitute for carrying it out in practice. Nouwen (1979: 42) describes the paradox as follows: “Everywhere Christian leaders have become increasingly aware of the need for more specific training and formation. This need is realistic, and the desire for more professionalism in the ministry is understandable. But the danger is that instead of becoming free to let the spirit grow, the future minister may entangle himself in the complications of his own assumed competence and use his specialism as an excuse to avoid the much more difficult task of being compassionate” (Nouwen 1979: 42).

Nel (2005: 17) shares his view that “people in ministry (full or part time) should be able to reflect upon the ministry with regard to knowledge, insight, competency and attitude as to what we do, why we do it, how we do it and with attitude we do what we do.”

iii. The Youth Pastor as a Part of the Church Leadership Team

Clark (Senter III 2001: 91) offers five pieces of advice to Youth Pastors who work as a part of a church leadership team, which I have summarised below:

1. Resist a “lone-ranger” attitude
2. Submit personally and in ministry as a part of the overall church leadership team
3. Connect students with other people and programs in the church
4. Partner with parents and other adults
5. Strategically plan to assimilate youth into the life of the church
The Youth Pastor ought to uphold at all times the principle that youth ministry is “a team effort” (Nel 2005: 164) and that a Youth Pastor cannot work only with the youth but must work together with partners in youth ministry, including other personnel, parents, other youth workers etc. Clark (Senter III 2001: 90) asserts that “Youth ministers must constantly resist the temptation to fight for their own programs or exclusively focus on the rights and needs of adolescents or strategically seek to move the youth ministry agenda ahead of the needs and concerns of the church.” He quotes the following words from Philippians 2: 3 – 4 which reads - “do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”

**The Youth Pastor and the Minister**

In most churches, the Youth Pastor is a part of a church leadership team and falls under the leadership of the minister. While a comprehensive description of the role of a minister or senior pastor falls outside of the scope of this research, it is necessary to describe briefly the role of the minister (also referred to as senior pastor). Hamilton (2002: 149) offers a reminder to senior pastors that “you set the tenor for the rest of the staff.” The minister’s role is to be a “chief among equals” (Westing 1997: 29) whose role is to “take on a burden, not a privilege.” This description is reminiscent of Christ’s words about servanthood and leadership in Matthew 20: 25 – 26. Jesus’ prayer that “they may be one” (John 17: 21) appeals to unity of those working within church staff teams as much as to every other arena of the life of the church. Westing (1997: 32) describes how a healthy relationship between a senior pastor and the Youth Pastor might look: “The lead pastor will do everything he can to make the Youth Pastor successful in directing the youth. The wants the Christian education director to have the most capable and gifted people on his team so that the Sunday School will flourish.” The minister has significant influence over the rest of the church leadership and the views he or she holds about youth ministry will affect the climate of youth ministry in that congregation as well as its methods, approach, budget and other factors. Clark (Senter III 2001: 91) comments that the senior pastor “has tremendous influence over a community’s willingness and ability to create an environment that is warm, relationally and sociologically safe, an inviting place of refuge for the young or any other member of the congregation.”

Kageler (2008: Kindle 1693) writes this: “What does it mean to have integrity as a Youth Pastor? We understand that we are not number one. We must face the fact squarely and honesty – as Youth Pastors we are not in charge of the church.” The Youth Pastor in a
healthy staff relationship will “understand his place in the hierarchy of importance with respect to the leading of the church” (Greer, Mouton, Zustiak 2003: 112), recognizing the burden of the senior pastor who bears primary responsibility for the congregation.

Generational Dynamics

Generational dynamics can play a role in the interpersonal relationships between Youth Pastors and ministers. Ministers may fall into the category of Millennial, Generation X or Baby Boomer. Millennials are those born approximately between 1980 and 2004, Generation X are those born between 1960 and 1980 and Baby Boomers are those born between 1946 and the 1964. Informal observation suggests that many Youth Pastors are young adults who fall into the category of “Generation Y” or “Millennials”. The qualities characteristic of each of these generations will affect the dynamics in the workplace relationship between ministers and Youth Pastors. Tulgan (2016: x) describes the workplace needs of Millennials as follows:

- “Millenials need strong, highly engaged managers;
- Millennials need structure and boundaries;
- Millennials need guidance, support, direction and coaching;
- Millennials need clear expectations;
- Millennials need to know somebody is keeping score; and
- Millennials to understand the quid pro quo of work every step of the way”

Apart from describing their needs, he also comments on the potential for conflict between generations by asking the question “Doesn’t every new generation of young workers irritate the older, more experienced ones?” (Tulgan 2016: 4). He describes some behaviours characteristic of those in Generation Y: “They are less obedient to employer’s rules and supervisor’s instructions. They are less likely to heed organisational chart authority. After all, they had incredibly close relationships with their previous authoritative role models, their parents, who treated them as equals. Instead, Millennials appreciate transactional authority: control of resources, control of rewards, and control of work conditions. Because they look to their immediate supervisor’s to meet their basic needs and expectations, they freely make demands on them.” (Tulgan 2016: 11)

Jacober (2011: Kindle 754) offers these positive traits characteristic of Millennials: “Millenials are surprisingly hopeful; they do have an interest in family, community and a value system they can believe. They are not as naively optimistic as some portray them to be. Nor are they refusing interaction.”

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Chapter 3: Description of the Problem

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores a theoretical background to the problematic phenomenon whereby negative interpersonal relationships on pastoral staff teams may negatively impact the tenure of Youth Pastors. Whilst the setting of the empirical study is limited geographically to South Africa, the limited research within this particular setting calls for exploration of literary research from international sources.

Osmer (1996: 173) describes a “massive failure of Protestantism to communicate a compelling vision of the Christian life to its young people.” Campolo (1995: 133) asserts that “of all the failures of mainline churches over the last three decades, none has been more pronounced than their failure in youth ministry.” This research aims to avoid perpetuating such a failure by addressing the problematic phenomenon whereby the disrupted tenure of Youth Pastors in local churches may limit their ability to contribute to youth ministry which is sustainable and effective.

3.2. WHAT IS GOING ON?

“Many within the body of Christ have entered the youth ministry marathon, but many quit before long, having lost joy and satisfaction. They’re wounded and weary.” (Fields 2002: 21)
Dean (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 322) suggests that the first question Practical Theology poses for Youth Ministry is “How can we describe the concrete situation in which God is calling us to act as youth ministers?”
Describing the impact that often occurs when Youth Pastors depart from their positions, Clark (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 9116-9117) puts it succinctly – “Great work has been undone by a messy or contentious exit.” This section explores the “undoing” that happens when the tenure of Youth Pastors is shortened, including that of exits influenced by negative interpersonal dynamics on pastoral staff teams.
3.2.1. The Context

Clark (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: 42) writes that “anyone who cares about children and adolescents has no choice but to take a new and careful look at how a postmodern, technological, and urbanized context affects the adolescent.” In order to understand the concrete problem that we seek to address, the problem must be evaluated with an understanding of the context from which the problem has emerged. Robbins (2004: Kindle 5872) writes that “there are at least three crucial reasons why any local youth ministry could be sharpened and aided by a more thorough understanding of the local youth culture.” They are as follows (1) understanding the needs, hopes and assets of the young people (2) enabled to be relevant to them (3) acting as a bridge between older and younger generations and cultures.

Nel (2015: 126) writes: “The nature of the gospel impels the church to be purposely involved with people and their needs. Or to say it differently, be culturally relevant.” Clark (Senter III 2001: 89) comments that “when we fail to acknowledge how far away from us the culture has moved, we also fail in our ability to impact this broken generation.” At the same time, whilst drawing from tools provided by an understanding of the prevailing culture is important, one ought to exercise caution against allowing cultural norms and trends to compromise the theological essence of the gospel. Dean (2001: Kindle 1476) points out that “it is possible for a theological agenda to be so thoroughly determined by the prevailing culture that precious little light can shine through.” The book title by McLaren and Campolo (2003) captures a similar concept – “How the Culture-Controlled Church Neutered the Gospel” (in Nel 2015: 33). Former chairman of conference of the MCSA Rev Peter Storey (2004: 54) warns against the scenario where ministry “success” is achieved because “the Gospel they offer is sociologically, rather than theoretically, determined and continually trimmed to the winds and whims of an affluent consumer culture.” He continues with a description of the church which sometimes “un-faithfully accommodates” the demands of the prevailing culture. He acknowledges the benefit of careful sociological analysis but insists that the purpose should be to develop an informed strategy to challenge and transform the worldly values of that culture rather than to modify the “package” to the tastes of consuming listeners. There will always be values and norms in the surrounding culture which are contrary to the gospel. These values and norms ought to be subject to prophetic confrontation rather than incorporated in the life of the church. There is a sense in which the church’s own identity is often found in its opposition to the world. Nel (2015: 76) describes it as follows - “while the world denies, rejects and opposes this Lord and his dominion, the church
confesses, accepts and serves him as the only one.” While the church as Christ’s representative loves the world and reaches out to the world, the church must not compromise God’s mission by mimicking the world or by allowing worldly values to shape its identity and practices. The Gospel, asserts Nel (2015: 109), is “no mere luxury, able to be neglected when it becomes uncomfortable, difficult or unpopular.” Gibbs (2013: 19) asserts that “in cultural contexts where basic Christian beliefs and the radical claims of the gospel are constantly being challenged, the church must humbly and boldly stand its ground with conviction, clarity and credibility.” Nel (2015: 207) offers a reminder that “the exegesis of the Bible and the exegesis of congregation and community are always equally important in developing a missional local church” (Nel 2015: 207). Therefore, one must vehemently avoid the tendency to compromise the gospel in the effort to be contextual. Van Gelder (2007: 35) offers the following caution with regard to social analysis and contextual ministry in the context of a local church:

“This is a helpful instinct to pursue in terms of working at re-contextualising a congregation’s ministry as changes take place. However, this strategy can become problematic when it leads to a kind of faddishness”

Therefore, the exploration of the context and culture in which this research is located is undertaken with a commitment that these factors are not considered at the risk of compromising above the church’s identity, but to more insightfully the question posed by Mann (1999: 98 cf Nel 2009): “How will we connect our deepest faith-identity to the realities of our context today?” The central task of Christian leadership is then, as Carroll (2011: 35) writes, “that of preserving the congregation’s identity as Christ’s body, but doing so in a way that is also appropriate in its particular culture and context.” Senter III (2001: 67 – 68) suggests that Youth Pastors must take continual cognizance of youth culture, church culture and the culture of God in order to help young people to live effectively in all three.

i. South Africa

South Africa has what the statistics website of the government calls a “predominantly young population” (www.statssa.gov.za). In a population of 51770560, the average age is 25 years old. Robbins (2004: Kindle 1044) quotes Borthwick’s article on global youth ministry, as he describes the context of South African youth ministry. “Youth ministry in the townships of South Africa addresses issues of violence, unemployment, and a deep hopelessness in youth about their future.” Young people in South Africa have had a turbulent past and face serious current challenges. Historically, young people have played a significant role in the political
liberation from the apartheid regime, most notably in the events of June 16, 1976 when numerous school children were killed in protests against the injustice of the Bantu education system. During the apartheid era, many youth were arrested and detained, often being held in adult prisons (Makiwane 2009: 223). These historical realities been addressed in policy and documentation of the government in recent years. In the National Youth Commission Act 1996, (www.gov.za/files/a19-96.pdf) the preamble states:

- “that it is necessary to create a united, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous society, in which the youth of South Africa shall promote national reconciliation and unity, build a new patriotism and foster peace, justice and a human rights culture”

- “it is imperative that South Africa recognises the role that youth played and will still play in society, and since the youth in South Africa constitutes an energetic, creative and the largest sector of our population, and given the challenges this sector faced and continues to face”

- “it is necessary to redress the imbalances of the past and to create a national youth policy aimed at empowering the youth and allowing them to realise their full potential through optimal access to opportunities”

Thus the documentation acknowledges youth as the largest sector in the South African community and seeks to empower the youth both to “redress” injustices of the past and for the sake of the potential of youth to contribute to reconciliation, unity, peace and patriotism. The document contains policies and guidelines for the formation of a commission that assesses and addresses the needs and opportunities of the youth of South Africa. According to statistics, 60.5% of South African youth aged 15-24 years old live in low-income households (Social Profile of Vulnerable Groups 2009 – 2012) and unemployment in South Africa has a significant effect on the well-being of South Africans aged 15 – 34 years old. In labour market statistics released in June 2015, it was revealed that when the worldwide economic crisis affected South Africa in recent years, it was the youth of South Africa who “bore the brunt of the crisis.” The report states that:
“Over the period 2008–2015, key labour market rates deteriorated by a larger margin among youth compared with adults, and the frustration of not finding employment has led many young people to become discouraged and exit the labour force altogether.”
(National and Provincial Labour Market Youth 2015: 1)

This discouragement and departure from the labour market is of great concern, especially considering the high levels of crime in the country. The high poverty rates in South Africa limit the number of churches in a position to employ a full time Youth Pastor. As Robbins (2004: Kindle 1088) notes when commenting on developing countries in general, “few of the greatest need areas in youth work globally will provide the funding a youth worker needs.”

ii. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa
The Book of Order of the MCSA (revised in 2014) mentions children or youth in a variety of contexts. With regard to the sacrament of Baptism, it states that Baptism may be administered “to a child who is in the care of parents, significant care givers or guardians, among whom one or more are members of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Instruction in the meaning of Baptism and guidance in the nature of the child’s faith in Jesus Christ shall be given before and after the Baptism” (Book of Order 2014: 14). The policy further states that “after the Baptism the parents, significant care givers or guardians of the child, or the baptized adult, shall be under the special pastoral care of the Leaders’ Meeting through the Sunday School or such other agency as the Leaders’ Meeting shall appoint” (Book of Order 2014: 15). These words are similar to those which have been used in Methodist publications as early as 1858, in which a discipline document of the United Methodist Church stated that a baptized child was “placed under the special care and supervision of the church.” The Book of Order also makes mention of children with regard to Holy Communion. While offering room for societies and circuits to move at their own pace with regard to the admission of children to Holy Communion, the following guidelines are offered:

“(a) the attitude of Jesus was to include children in His Kingdom;
(b) children are able to make a response of faith appropriate to their age and grow in faith by participating in worship;
(c) children can make a valid contribution to the life of the Church and should not be separated from their parents in this central act of worship; The Methodist Book of Order
(d) children need to be affirmed and made welcome and to enjoy a greater sense of community in the Church.

Conference therefore resolves that baptized children who show evidence of faith in Jesus may be admitted to Holy Communion.”

The MCSA structures includes a Connexional Youth Unit consisting of a team of individuals under the leadership of the Connexional Youth Coordinator. This individual represents the unit on the Connexional Executive. The unit operates under its own constitution and exists to:

“(a) Promote discipleship of Christ amongst young people;
(b) Encourage young people to play a vital role in the life of the Church;
(c) Help acquaint young people with biblical knowledge and to encourage them to actively participate in Christian Evangelistic programs that foster a Christ-like lifestyle;
(d) Promote enthusiasm and loyalty for the work of God as exercised through the Church in particular;
(e) Present God to the world through the Church.”

(Book of Order 2014: 98)

Every year a Youth Synod is held in each district, under the direction of the general Synod of that district. Youth Pastor appointments are recorded annually in the minutes of each district Synod. The Book of Order states that those involved in children’s ministry “must be properly screened and trained” (Book of Order 2004: 99) and stipulates a personal relationship with Christ, regular worship attendance and full membership in the MCSA as requirements.

In 2008, the Methodist Connexional Conference noted “the challenges faced by young people such as substance abuse, matters of sexuality and violence in schools” and resolved to draft specialised programmes to engage parents and young people on these challenges which would be “on-going, sustainable and treated as part of the core business of the church.” In 2015, Conference raised several issues pertaining to the well-being of young people including concern about hazards in school transport for children, police clearance for those working with children in the church, the need to engage young people on what it means to be African and “dismay” at the increase in deaths of young males at illegal initiation schools (Yearbook 2015: Chapter 2). In an appendix to the Book of Order 2014 there is a resolution on pastoral work which includes the following passages from the early days of Methodism:
“In order that the work of God may be perpetuated among us, let us, in public and in private, pay particular spiritual attention to the young people of our Societies and congregations.” (1820, p. 149) Let us frequently and affectionately speak to them on their peculiar dangers and duties, and seek to enlist their sympathy with our Doctrines and Discipline; and that they ‘may be delivered from this present evil world, according to the will of God’, let us strive to lead them to an earnest consecration of themselves to the service of Christ and His Church (1827, p. 281). And to secure increased facilities for such ministrations, let us, wherever practicable, make arrangements for obtaining pastoral access, at stated times, to the young persons of Methodist families between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one, with a view to promote their spiritual welfare by personal instruction, exhortation, appeal, and prayer (1845, p. 242).”

(Book of Order 2014: 177)

There is ongoing uncertainty about the function of Youth Pastors in the MCSA. This is a matter which is reflected in the resolutions made at the annual Connexional Conference in recent years (sourced from http://www.methodist.org.za/news/02072012-1552):

- In 2006 that the Youth Unit take recommendations for the “entry requirements, accountability, training and remuneration” through the channels of decision making in the church.

- In 2008, the Conference noted “concerns around the recruitment, appointment and role played by the Youth Pastors” and adopted a resolution whereby an operational recruitment and screening process would be followed across the Connexion, along with the stipulation that Youth Pastors need to be full members of the Methodist Church prior to appointment and that the Education for Mission and Ministry Unit (EMMU) was commissioned to design an “appropriate training programme to standardise Youth Pastor training in line with the Methodist ethos”

- In 2009 that the training of Youth Pastors be formalized with EMMU once again directed to provide the curriculum and identify training facilitators
• In 2010 and 2011 conference noted “with concern” the minimal attendance of Youth Pastors at youth synods

• In 2013, it was noted “that there is no formal or standardised theological training nor set guidelines outlining their appointment, stationing, remuneration and other employee service conditions” leading conference to refer the matter to EMMU and Human Resources as well as to place a moratorium on the contractual employment of lay and Youth Pastors for the duration of 2014

• In 2014, Conference lifted this moratorium and resolved that training for Youth Pastors was compulsory, recommending the 4G Programme which is an initiative of the Hennops River Circuit of the MCSA

• In 2015, it was noted that “the continuing need to clarify the nature and function of Youth Pastors’ work and the anticipated relationships with Circuit, District and Connexion, Conference requests EMMU in consultation with DEWCOM to determine whether the ministry of Youth Pastors is of covenantal or contractual nature.”

While some progress has been made in the formalisation of a training programme for Youth Pastors in the MCSA, there is still uncertainty around issues of their role, function, requirements and relationship to the church and its structures. During 2013 and 2016, sixteen Youth Pastors completed the 4G Programme which is affiliated but not formally connected to EMMU. At least five of these individuals were Wesley Guild members before, during and after their completion of the programme.

iii. Postmodernism

Culture can be described “as a concept that captures the subtle, elusive, intangible, largely unconscious forces that shape a society” (Deal 1982: 4). In an effort to understand the culture of the young people that we minister to “can help us to move more effectively in and out of that culture” (Robbins 2004: Kindle 5997). Like the apostle Paul who to the Jews became like a Jew (1 Corinthians 9: 17), we enter into the world of those we are trying to reach. Some of the characteristics common to the dominant culture of the current context are:
• A growing secularization (Robbins 2004: Kindle 6781; Nel 2000: 41) in which the significance of religious ideals and institutions is reduced. As Nel (2015: 91) puts it, the world “denies with growing bluntness the uniqueness, and even the existence, of God.”

• A growing pluralism (Robbins 2004: Kindle 6886; Heitink 1999: 282) whereby there is a wide range of choices available to individuals pertaining to beliefs and world-view

• A growing privatism (Robbins 2004: Kindle 6947) or what Nel (2000: 43) refers to as “the fall of public man” whereby it is the norm for each individual’s moral and religious beliefs to remain exclusively within the sphere of one’s private life

One of the most influential dynamics in the current cultural climate is the development of postmodernism - a paradigm emerging from the deconstruction of modern ways of thinking. Modernism emerged as a result of the Enlightenment in the 19th Century, characterized by a pursuit of absolute values and scientific knowledge. In the first half of the 20th century, it began to become clear that “science is not capable of answering all questions and the human mind might not be able to solve every problem” (Jones 2001: 22). The purism of absolute foundations began to be replaced with a more sceptical outlook. Knowledge was regarded as inherently good during the initial stages of scientific progress in the modern era, but the passage of time revealed that such knowledge would not necessarily contribute to the good of society, but had power also to bring destruction e.g. the invention of nuclear weaponry. Robbins (2004: Kindle 7051) articulates that “the myth of human progress has been overcome by the reality of human history.”

Postmodernism stands on the premise that one should “question all premises” (Jones 2001: 22). The paradigm resists the concept of absolute truth or metanarratives, which are “all-inclusive ways of understanding life” (Robbins 2004: Kindle 7042). Postmodern philosophers “have argued that there is no grand metanarrative (overarching story or common experience that unites all human beings) and they have thereby attempted to deconstruct most philosophies and religions” (Jones 2001: 25). Postmodernism “rejects the notion of objectivity” (Robbins 2004: Kindle 7025), asserting that each person perceives reality with a particular perspective. The suggestion that religion no longer holds an authoritative status in prevailing culture was confirmed in recent research entitled *UnChristian* by Kinnamon and Lyons (2007: 25, 26). Based in the United States, the research revealed that only 16% of young people have a “good impression of Christianity” with the
most significant negative perceptions being that Christians were seen as anti-homosexual, judgemental, hypocritical, old-fashioned, too politically involved, boring, not accepting of other faiths and insensitive to others (Nel 2015: 198; Kinnamon & Lyons 2007: 25, 26). The perception of young people involved in the research was summed up as follows: “They think Christians no longer represent what Jesus had in mind, that Christianity in our society is not what it was meant to be... for many people the Christian faith looks weary and threadbare. They admit they have a hard time actually seeing Jesus because of all the negative baggage that now surrounds him” (Nel 2015: 198; Kinnamon & Lyons 2007: 25, 26). While the South African context “probably contains a strange mixture of pre-modern, modern and postmodern philosophies” (Nel 2000: 48), the influence of postmodern thought is growing, particularly among young people. Young people are “natives” to the culture of postmodernism. As Jones (2001: 29) writes, “the Millennials are getting full-blown, no-holds-barred postmodern thought.” As Osmer states, they are exposed “to a multiplicity of perspectives” (Osmer 1996: 16). Youth ministry in the current context needs to take seriously the notion that young people in particular have been influenced by postmodern thought. This does not mean that the church ought to react against postmodernism, but rather to respond with “a growing openness” (Nel 2000: 47) and to approach youth ministry with an understanding that methods which were effective for previous generations are unlikely to achieve the same results in the current context. Nel (2000: 48) offers a positive perspective of the impact of postmodernism as a paradigm which presents the church with “great new possibilities of representing and serving God on earth with integrity and in a convincing way.” Robbins offers some thoughts on the tendency of Christian mission to respond with negativity to the surrounding culture – “What is the proper response of Christianity to culture? Are we to salt the culture or assault the culture? Are we subversive agents trying to overthrow a fallen system or agents of reconciliation trying to heal a broken world?” Arthur (2007: 22) points out that “propositional truth claims and rational arguments are poor starting points for communicating Christian faith to this generation.” Relational aspects of ministry hold more weight than truth claims and arguments, as Jones (2001: 22) describes: “To a world that doesn’t believe that such a metanarrative exists, we are going to have to be creative in how we tell the story. Instead of getting a student to profess a belief in the authority of scripture at the front end, we may be better off first inviting students into the community, to experience the truth of scripture as it’s lived out by Christian students and leaders.”
3.2.2. The Problem

Statistics from the United States of America reveal that the average tenure of a Youth Pastor (in the United States) at a particular local church is between 3.7 and 4.8 years. These statistics refute the frequently quoted but unsubstantiated claim that the average tenure of a Youth Pastor is 18 months (Kageler 2008: Kindle 225). Nevertheless, it is recognised that in many cases youth ministry is impacted by the tendency for short tenure among Youth Pastors. De Vries (2008: 32) asserts that “the short tenure, age and inexperience of most youth workers positions them to be ill-equipped to advocate for the level of investment necessary to build a sustainable future.” Kageler (2008: Kindle 135) captures a glimpse of the destructiveness of such a phenomenon in this quote: “I’ve seen too many youth workers crash and burn. I’ve seen churches, after the (forced or otherwise) departure of their Youth Pastor vow “never again” when it comes to having a Youth Pastor as part of the pastoral staff.”

De Vries (2008: 100) summarizes the impact that occurs with a “bad hire” of a Youth Pastor in the following quote, upon which the rest of this section is structured:

“So much more than financial, puncturing the sense of call in the mismatched person, deflating the momentum of a youth ministry, erasing the trust of students.”

While this quote addresses a misguided appointment of a Youth Pastor, it is my observation that departure of a Youth Pastor under any negative circumstances may result in the three effects that are described:

- The impact on the Youth Pastor
  “Puncturing the sense of call in the mismatched person”

- The impact on the youth ministry of the church
  “Deflating the momentum of Youth Ministry”

- The impact on the young people
  “Erasing the trust of students”

i. The Impact on The Youth Pastor

Senter III (2001: 122) suggests that the structural expectations of the church have made discontinuity in Youth Pastor tenure the norm, tending to “lock them out of continuity in discipling relationships.” He describes the typical scenario as follows - “Church leadership
has treated youth ministers as novice adults rather than permanent parts of the church’s strategy of discipleship and world evangelization... consequently the expectation has developed that these big kids will grow up and move away. “It is recognised that many Youth Pastors leaving youth ministry do so under negative circumstances. A fictional Youth Pastor is described as an example of a typical scenario - “He is like the majority of youth ministers who quit out of sheer exhaustion and spiritual, social and vocational isolation” (Dean & Foster 1998: 33). De Vries (2008: 95) quotes the spoken words of Doug Fields, capturing the pain caused when appointments are made without each party clarifying expectations: “I’ve heard too many horror stories of men and women who’ve been emotionally abused, fired, hurt, or have left youth ministry because their blind enthusiasm matched a church’s desperation for a youth worker and everyone said yes before knowing enough about one another”

ii. The Impact on the Youth Ministry of the Church
As previously quoted, De Vries (2008: 101) described the problem of Youth Pastor departures in terms of a “deflated youth ministry.” Osmer (1996: 5) confirms what we instinctively suspect - that “a pattern of high participation during childhood, diminished involvement during adolescence and departure during late adolescence and young adulthood is widely established in mainline Protestantism.” When youth ministry is threatened in the life of the church, the church is adversely affected in its ability to fulfil God’s mission as it relates to young people. It is threatened by the diminished number of young people involved in congregational life. An unhealthy or ineffective youth ministry is likely to result in declined membership and attendance across the ages, affecting churches on a local level and ultimately in the decline of a denomination. Young people enrich the body of Christ in many ways and when absent leave a significant deficit. The Apostle Paul asserts that although he is young, Timothy is in a position to “set an example for the believers” (1 Timothy 4: 12). David White (Dean, Clark, and Rahn 2011: Kindle 4546-4552) captures some of the ways in which young people enrich the life of the congregation: “Youth have vital gifts for the adult world, drained by alienating work of much of its life. Youth have gifts of questioning for adults who have been so enculturated by social and cultural forces and have forgotten their own questions. Youth have gifts of play for adults and congregations who have forgotten that God’s foundational work of creation was an act of play, and that Christ’s work in the world is a playful redemption of too-serious forces. Youth have gifts for courageous historic action and can once again, as in Civil Rights movements, labour movements, peace movements, and
modern movements of diversity, be at the forefront of movements of justice and peace, in the name of God. The church can risk empowering youth through engaging them in rhythms of critical discernment of the powers, or it can relegate them to volleyball games and marginal spaces in the church attic or basement.” When negative factors result in young people leaving the congregation, this typically affects their parents’ membership as well. In one study, “ministry to youth was the second most important reason people give for joining a congregation” (Ratcliffe 1991: 3). Kageler (2008: Kindle 355) notes that “parents who feel a congregation is not meeting the needs of their family are likely to switch to a church that is innovating in ways that keep and attract children/youth/families.”

iii. The Impact on the Young People
The previous chapter outlined that it is the responsibility of the church to create as much stability as possible in the relationships that are facilitated between youth and adults in the church, with particular emphasis on the Youth Pastor. Dean (2004: 77) describes this need in terms of fidelity: “Postmodern adolescents are preoccupied with fidelity: ‘Will you be there for me?’ Before adolescents can take seriously the gospel’s claim that Jesus will ‘be there’ always, a community of affirming others must ‘be there’ for them, demonstrating steadfast love on their behalf.” Heflin (2009: Kindle 1616) describes an incident where a young person in his church was convinced that his Youth Pastor would depart before he graduated from high school because “he had learned not to trust adults.” Youth may be effective particularly when such departures are characterised by negative interpersonal dynamics. Strommen and Hardel (2000: 169) explain that “youth quickly sense a congregation’s atmosphere. Tensions caused by divisive feelings and power struggles repel them, but an atmosphere of warmth, cohesiveness and exuberance draws them in.”

De Vries (2008:126) avoids the notion that the relationship with one central Youth Pastor is the only relationship of importance for the young person in the church. He does, however, capture some of the emotional turmoil that can occur in the lives of a young person when there is a high turnover of Youth Pastors as he explains one parent’s dilemma: “My daughter – an active member of the youth group – has bonded with and then had to say goodbye to three different youth ministers over the years. How do you teach a teenager about perseverance and the importance of long term committed relationships when your church life can’t back it up? How do you deal with the hurt and hesitation of building new relationships when they keep falling away?”
Arthur (2007: 72) speaks to fellow Youth Pastors, asserting that “we youth workers, notoriously, don’t always stick around in the same job for long, at which point many of the kids we built relationships with tend to drift away from the church.” Senter III (2001: 120) describes the “continuity in discipleship relationships” as “the most vulnerable point in youth ministry.” He points to the specialized, age-divided programs, family mobility and turnover and changes in personnel as contributing to the discontinuity. He describes elsewhere the common scenario whereby “adults earn the right to nurture young people and then, somewhat artificially, attempt to hand their young friends to another disciple three or four years later” (Senter III 2001: 121).

This emphasis on the need for consistency by the Youth Pastor is to be seen in the context of stability in the entire web of relationships supplied by the local church. As Dean (2004: 91) writes, “fidelity is never only an individual responsibility; even the fidelity of God issues in three persons.” The effort to maintain stability with regard to the appointment of a Youth Pastor is a part of a more holistic commitment by the local church to provide communal stability and relational availability of the adults in the whole congregation.

### 3.3. WHY IS IT GOING ON?

This section aims to consider some of the factors why the appointments of Youth Pastors in local congregations come to an end. Higgs (2003: 31) states it as follows – “Sadly, the longer you are in youth ministry, the longer you feel your list of sidelined and flat-lined comrades becomes. And the obvious question is Why?”

This section is structured around the following quote by De Vries (2008: 114):

“Without appropriate boundaries, without intentional habits of self-restoration, without accountable and intimate relationships, none of us is equipped to carry on a healthy and sustainable youth ministry for long”

#### 3.3.1. Lack of Appropriate Boundaries

Boundaries are the limits that are set in a particular context such as a relationship, role or task. Inadequate boundaries are experienced in a variety of ways. The three sub-headings that will be explored under the issue of boundaries include (i) conflict (ii) unrealistic expectations and (iii) A lack of support.
i. Conflict

Zustiak (2003: 108) states that “research shows that the cause of most people leaving the ministry is interpersonal conflict.” Fields (2002: 128) describes conflict as “a huge problem in youth ministry” and explains its inevitability: “When imperfect people work in imperfect situations, problems arise. Regardless of whether you are paid or volunteer, as soon as you say yes to a leadership position, you’re saying yes to conflict.” Dean (2011: Kindle 8206) suggests that “learning to resolve conflict increases communication and effectiveness in ministry. Unresolved conflict leads to alienation and a breakdown in communication.” DeVries (2008: 28) writes that many people enter youth ministry “ill equipped to walk through the political minefields that are a part of every church.” Conflict in the church is also common because people’s experience with church is ‘intertwined with intense feelings about life, holiness and God’ (Watts, Nye, Savage 233).

Conflict in Ministry

Kageler (2008) has conducted surveys among youth workers in the United States who left positions as a result of being “forced out” or “burnt out.” Although geographically removed and not denominationally confined to the setting for this study, his research offers insight into the factors contributing to premature departure of Youth Pastors in the United States. Kageler (2008: Kindle 1564) notes that 94% of Youth Pastors who get fired cite conflict with the senior pastor as the primary reason, with a further 46% naming conflict other individuals in church leadership as the reason for their departure (2008: Kindle 692). His advice to Youth Pastors is the following – “If we think we can be in youth ministry and avoid conflict, we are fooling ourselves” (Kageler 2008: Kindle 692).

Conflict with the Minister

Fields (2002: 156) offers the following advice to Youth Pastors: “A wise Youth Pastor develops a positive relationship with the church’s senior minister.” Zustiak (2003: 108) writes that “the single biggest problem facing men and women in youth ministry is probably the inability to communicate or develop a good relationship with the senior minister.” With regard to conflict with the senior pastor, Kageler (2008: Kindle 714) suggests several underlying factors leading to these conflicts as reported by Youth Pastors who participated in his study:
Differing philosophies of ministry

This factor is also described also by Zustiak (2003: 110) who stresses the difference between negotiable preferences where the Youth Pastor should submit to the authority of the senior pastor with humility, as opposed to non-negotiable theological disagreements in which the Youth Pastor will need to decide whether to fight it or choose to leave.

Pastoral insecurity” or jealousy by the senior pastor

The replacement of entire staff teams when a new pastor begins at a church

The “scapegoat” phenomenon

This factor is described as a phenomenon whereby the church leadership chooses to dismiss a Youth Pastor in order to avoid conflict with the youth or their parents rather than taking a course of meaningful mediation through the conflict.

Westing (1997: 50) describes the potential for envy and pride to play a role in the relationship between a minister and those on staff, especially when a new staff member is “apparently having greater success than they are.” Tony Campolo (1989: 170) observes that Youth Pastors can contribute to or cause conflict in these relationships by doing “an end run around their pastors”, in the following ways:

1. Displaying their more up to date education
2. Casting the senior pastors as “keeper of the status quo”
3. By using youth ministry to climb the denominational big-shot ladder

Kageler (2008: Kindle 692) describes conflict as a “major ministry hazard” not only because it increases the chances of dismissal but its contribution to burnout in ministry. Even among those who resigned due to burn-out and not directly because of dismissal or conflict, 43% described the primary catalyst as a pastor who was “hard to get along with” (Kageler 2008: Kindle 999). As a result of the senior pastor’s influence and power, conflict with the senior pastor can result in a “mirroring” of this conflict in relationships with the rest of church leadership (Kageler 2008: Kindle 773). Kageler (2008: Kindle 1572) writes the following from the perspective of his own experience as a Youth Pastor: “The office of the senior pastor
is a clearing house, an ecclesiastical funnel, through which bad news about us may pass. There may come a point when the quantity of bad news finally tips the balance against us, and we find ourselves in a major conflict."

Robbins (2004: Kindle 1201 - 1231) describes three leadership models and explains that “every person in youth ministry will be working for people and with people who exercise authority along the lines of one of these three headship models.” The first leadership style is “chain of command” which is authoritative and top-down. The second is “sharing” which is relational but lacks any authority or headship function. The third is “servant” and is a model in which leadership is taken seriously but within a context of a “support and nurture role of the leader.” Understanding the leadership style of the pastor is helpful for avoiding conflict. It should be noted that conflict with a supervisor or boss is not unique to youth ministry. According to a Gallup Poll-based survey of 80 000 managers, Buckingham (1999) found that the most common reason for leaving employment in any sector is difficulties with one’s direct supervisor.

The fact that conflict with the senior pastor is so frequently named as a factor for burnout, dismissal and other forms of departure may reveal a lack of insight and skill in church leadership teams when it comes to conflict and human resource management. This is an area where the Youth Pastor is limited in his or her ability to influence or change the situation. In a paper addressing burnout among Youth Pastors, Kageler (2010: 21) writes: “The youth worker has little control over a senior pastor’s attitudes or understanding of youth ministry. Similarly, pastoral training often lacks even rudimentary training in leadership and management of staff. Woe be to the youth worker whose pastor is skill-less in encouraging and unleashing paid and volunteer staff in youth ministry or any ministry. Youth ministry educators can at least, however, encourage their students to “choose wisely” when in the job search, and arm future youth workers with the knowledge of the special skills it takes to work successfully in a supervisor structure.” As Fields (2002: 158) points out, “senior pastors who are superb in the pulpit aren’t necessarily gifted in management and administration.” Hamilton (2002: 148) notes that “most pastors receive little training in managing staff.” Writing to senior pastors and church leaders, Westing (1997: 11) describes the task of building unity in church staff teams in the life of a minister as “our highest call but probably our hardest call.” Westing (1997: 13) notes that “it is rare to find one in four multiple staffs working in love and harmony” (1999: 13). Nel (2015: 171) describes the negative impact that results when pastors are not willing to work together with others, writing that a “lack of
vitality in local churches can without any doubt be ascribed to the inability and unwillingness of pastors to share their ministry and leadership with others."

Youth Pastors may be limited in their ability to control the dynamics of church staff teams, but it remains important that he or she does make an effort within his or her realm of control in those relationships. Stevens (cf Zustiak 2003: 108) states that “as the junior partner in this staff relationship, we must give every evidence of capability, concern and cooperation. The credibility we need to lead effectively is not automatically invested in us, it must be earned.”

Zustiak (2003: 108) writes that “your relationship with fellow church staffers will have a direct impact on whether or not your ministry is successful. When other staff members and leaders are interested and supportive of you and your ministry, they may be influential in ways you will never know. This support will not come naturally; it will have to be earned.”

He suggests that senior ministers who appear to have little time for mentoring their Youth Pastor “may have had bad experiences with previous Youth Pastors who didn’t want his input” (Zustiak 2003: 109). Consequently, he exhorts Youth Pastors to take the initiative in building a relationship with the senior pastor. He offers practical ways to strengthen the relationship, such as encouraging him, helping him succeed, making him look good, loving him, praying for him and earning his trust (Zustiak 2003: 110). He describes how trust is built through clear, continuous communication, keeping confidence and displaying loyalty when others criticise the senior pastor. De Vries (2008: 239) warns Youth Pastors against ignoring the “pet peeves” of their senior minister as this will contribute to a wounded relationship. Kageler (2008: 73) offers the following as components of a good relationship with the senior pastor – “time, encouragement, not laying blame, being content, lots of prayer, good communication, empathetic understanding.”

Conflict with Other Role Players in Ministry

While conflict with the senior pastor was the factor most frequently cited, conflicts with others was cited as well such as that with parents of youth for 15% of those fired, and with the youth themselves for 4% (Kageler 2008: Kindle 692) of those fired. Parents, who have a “vested interest in youth ministry” (Kageler 2008: Kindle 810), may take clear action against Youth Pastors when experiencing a conflict out of concern for the spiritual well-being of their children. Jones (2001: 225) commends the trait of “political savvy” in Youth Pastors, noting that “many Youth Pastors have lost their jobs due to their inability to massage politically delicate situations in their churches.” While conflict in ministry may be inevitable, it remains imperative that conflict is addressed whenever it emerges in the church and particularly on
staff teams. Osbourne (2010: 27) writes that “whenever a [church] board or staff suffers from significant conflict, the whole congregation suffers.” Boundaries need to be established so that “conflict is managed with respect, appropriate language and integrity” which enables “all staff members to potently express their point of view” (McIntosh 2000: 166).

ii. Unrealistic Expectations
It is unsurprising that many Youth Pastors report feelings of inadequacy when one considers the weight of the pressure that one typically experiences in the field. The following quote describes these demands: “What is the actual, bottom-line job of the Youth Pastor? Or possibly more important vocationally, what makes for a competent and successful youth minister? The list of answers is massive, enough to frighten any sane person. And when you line up all the expectations that a professional youth worker carries on top of the written, black-and-white tasks of, the sheer weight of the role can be overwhelming” (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 4628-4631).

When it comes to youth ministry, “the job is never finished” (Robbins 2004: Kindle 2921). Heitink (1999: 323) describes the malaise caused by many pastors who “become frustrated by the fact that they must do so many things for which they possess no skills.” In an unpublished dissertation for the Southern Baptism Seminary, Minardi (1987: 67–68) listed several different vocational roles expected of a Youth Pastor “including that of administrator, educator/enabler, recreator/ activities director, counsellor, and pastoral worship leader.” The tasks and roles are sizeable to the point where De Vries (2008: 111) comments that any “youth workers who don’t feel they’re overwhelmed and failing at times, may simply not understand their jobs.”

Unrealistic Expectations from Self
Penner (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 8687 – 8688) advises novice Youth Pastors not to place these pressures on themselves saying - “Not only have most youth ministry vets realized they can’t do everything, but they’ve also realized that God never intended them to do it all.” With reference to church leaders in general, Nel (2015: 170) makes a comment equally applicable to the context of a Youth Pastor - “however able a person may be, he or she must be mature enough to admit that it is not possible to be the one and only leader.” Rahn (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 8711 – 8712) warns of the consequence if a Youth Pastor cannot accept his or her limitations – “At the end of each week, we must find ways to make peace with the worth of our work. If we don’t, we can get chased out of youth ministry by our
insecurities and bewilderment.” Robbins (2004: Kindle 1545) writes “Youth ministry is crammed with ... decisions, and there is always the temptation to play into the crowd, the students, the elders, the culture, our youth ministry peers. We may well be lauded for the job we have accomplished. But to walk that course is to forsake our calling to pursue a career. It is a vital distinction.”

Unrealistic Expectations from Others

The pressure to succeed in all areas may come from several sources, such as church leadership, parents and the youth themselves. De Vries (2008: 40) writes that “the pressure to succeed is especially acute for youth ministers who – despite their lack of knowledge, skills and experience – are expected to attract young adolescents to a life of commitment to Christ and the church. It is a daunting task made increasingly difficult by the expectations of adults and a notable lack of congregational support.” He notes that the “often apparent “failure” of the youth ministry is caused less by an underperforming youth worker than an overcapacity youth ministry” (De Vries 2008: 35). He describes this as a crisis of capacity and believes that it is the reason for what is perceived as “chronic under performance” of youth workers. Powell (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 4662-4666) goes as far as to say that it “seems to be that they should be omni-competent, omni-skilled, and omni-gifted.” Dean (2004: 90) describes the weight of the demands on a Youth Pastor in writing that “adolescents do not just drink from our wells, they suck us dry. Young people are so thirsty for God that they absorb every ounce of prayer, love and energy we have to offer, thinking that our fidelity can suffice for God’s.” Powell (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: 4821 – 4822) writes that “no Youth Pastor can or should be expected to develop and maintain mastery in all the spiritual gifts. It is a theological and anthropological impossibility.” Nevertheless, unrealistic expectations are not uncommon. Sometimes such expectations are clear from the first advertisement for the vacancy. De Vries (2008:44) writes that “the excruciating exaggerated requirement found in so many of these job descriptions gives evidence of little more than a history of chronic dissatisfaction with those who have gone before.”

Number-Based Expectations

One of the most common sources of pressure in Youth Ministry is the expectation numerical growth. The tendency to over-emphasize attendance in youth ministry was described by Sarah Little (1968: 8) as the “numbers game.” De Vries (2008: 25) writes: that “people in ministry do have a self-defeating and sometimes vicious habit of measuring their self-worth
(and that of others) based on the size of their ministry.” Similarly, Fields (2002: 26) describes the “myth that bigger is better and that the value of your leadership is based on how many students you have” Based on research of 3600 Canadian youth, Poterski (1985: 14) concluded that “bigness is not necessarily better when trying to touch people who have tasted intimacy and have experienced what it is to belong. Large size alone is threatening, it can alienate the very people the organization aims to help.” A growing youth ministry without careful consideration can fall into an unhealthy pattern whereby “program maintenance takes priority over people maintenance” (Robbins 2004: Kindle 11653). These statements are not intended to imply that one should not make use of measurable goals in youth ministry such as monitoring and aiming to build attendance. The numerical growth of a youth group is “in many case desirable and necessary in order to do God’s work in a community” (Dunn & Senter III 1997: 143). A focus on numbers can be unhealthy when used as a measure of the Youth Pastor’s personal self-worth, but can be healthy as a tool planning and strategizing effective youth ministry. A Youth Pastor cannot simultaneously reject an awareness of numbers while also intentionally aiming to grow the ministry (De Vries 2008: 27). De Vries (2008: 67) poses the question of what would happen if Youth Pastors “stopped fighting against numbers and started taking responsibility for determining what measurements will best help them track the results they want to achieve.”

Unclear Expectations
Expectations are not always clearly communicated in recruitment or appointment of new Youth Pastors. By the time that expectations are stated, the damage has already been done.

iii. Lack of Support and Training
Westing (1997: 40) tells a story that many Youth Pastors may relate to. It is the story of a newly appointed, inexperienced Youth Pastor who failed to meet the expectations of the parents of the youth and was brought before the board: “The board sent him back to work with a new list of expectations. He desperately needed a friend, a pastor, a disciple who could guide and encourage him. Instead, he received a harder job description. Now his chances of success were slim. Many young men have potential that could be salvaged for great ministry if only someone could see it in them as Barnabas saw it in the newly converted Paul. Fortunately, after he was dismissed, another pastor saw the potential in Jerry and gave him a new chance.”
Youth Pastors may experience a lack of support emotionally, financially and in terms of training. In one study of Youth Pastors who left one position for another, 40% cited “a lack of adequate lay leadership for youth ministry and a lack of congregational support for the work of the Youth Pastor” (Grenz 2002: 83). Borgman (1987: 73) describes congregations as often wanting “a single, dynamic person, usually male, who will serve at a low salary for a few years before moving on” while De Vries (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2001: Kindle 3315) writes that “most youth ministries today are funded for failure, setting aside just enough money to guarantee a frustrated staff.” This problem of youth workers as “overworked and underpaid” may account for many cases of reduced tenure in youth ministry. De Vries (2008: 104) says that a church “(intentionally or unintentionally) communicates how long it wants its staff to stay by how much it is willing to pay” and that “the difference between an effective and ineffective youth ministry is often directly tied to the level of investment a church makes” (De Vries 2008: 31). Black (Senter III 2001: 51) comments that Youth Pastors are almost forced to look beyond youth ministry if it cannot provide a realistic salary which includes appropriate benefits and recoverable expenses such as a book allowance and travel allowance.

Adequate training is another important factor related to the support of Youth Pastors. Kageler (2010: 19) points out the importance of training, especially with regard to the practical and strategic elements of day to day ministry. In a study by Kageler it was found that youth workers in the European Union were more likely to feel personally inadequate for youth ministry than youth workers in the United States in spite of the fact that on average the European youth workers were more likely to have a tertiary qualification in youth ministry. While he asserts that the questions raised cannot be answered in the paper in which the results were published, he does offer his own personal observations that “youth work degrees in the EU are strong on theory and ideas, while being less strong on matters of praxis. It could be that a much higher percentage of US youth ministry educators (most of whom now hold Ph.D.’s so as to qualify them for a teaching position at the college/university/seminary level) were once actual church-based Youth Pastors themselves and are more geared to see youth work in terms of the strategic operationalization of specific skills.” This would suggest that practical training in strategy and operations is important in the prevention of feelings of inadequacy among youth workers.
3.3.2. Lack of Intentional Habits of Self-Restoration

“If we are going to successfully survive our first five or 10 years in youth ministry, we must learn the secrets of renewal. A renewed heart and spirit make it possible for us to not be blown away by criticism. A renewed heart keeps us going when we are starved to see results and go hungry instead. A renewed heart makes it possible to keep perspective when it seems like our world is falling apart” (Kageler 2008: 167)

“To attempt youth ministry alone, without the benefit of God’s partnership, is a betrayal of the call. He only wants us in this ministry if we’re willing to let him be our partner. Youth workers who are too busy or too arrogant to pray have no place in youth work, and their work won’t meet standards of excellence over the long haul” (Jones 2001: 226). Robbins (2004: Kindle 2710) summarises unhealthy tendencies among youth workers as described by spiritual director Beth Slevcove in an address at the National Youthworkers Convention in California in 2002:

- Compulsiveness to do more and be better which leads to exhaustion and despair
- Little awareness of intimacy with Christ
- Lack of safe space for honesty and accountability
- Belief that asking for help is a sign of weakness
- Not observing the Sabbath (or weekly day of rest)
- Defining oneself by what one does i.e. What I do = Who I Am
- Pressure to live up to the “fun, extroverted youth worker” stereotype

In extensive research of 2500 Youth Pastors in the United States of America, researchers Strommen, Jones and Rahn identified six common concerns among youth workers which are cited by Kageler (2008: Kindle 97) in The Youth Ministry Survival Guide.

1. Feelings of personal inadequacy
2. Strained family relationships
3. A growing loss of confidence
4. Feeling unqualified for the job
5. Disorganized in one’s work habits
6. Burnout

Personal and spiritual restoration is of crucial importance in youth ministry, given the demands of the profession. Robbins (2004: Kindle 2906) describes it as follows:
“We perform on the high wire of leadership, week after week, year after year, standing in the spotlight of ministry. The one day comes a collapse, a fall, because we simply do not feel we can hold on any longer. What results is dropout, fallout and burnout.”

In a study by the Link Institute’s study of over 2,100 youth workers in 1997, only one in five expressed a sense of satisfaction with their work (Youthworker, November/December 1997: 50). Given the demands of their role, it is essential that the needs and concerns of those in youth ministry are heard and addressed. It is vital that the ministry of the Youth Pastor does not become detached from its own theological foundation and that the demands of youth ministry do not reduce to a to-do list that which is first and foremost an endeavour in Practical Theology. Detonni (1993: 17) describes how the “tyranny of the immediate forces many to neglect the weightier matters of youth ministry.” Youth Pastors need to be intentional about avoiding this pattern. Dean & Foster (1998: 192-193) stress the importance of the spiritual disciplines, writing “we must intentionally carve out sacred space in our own lives, times of replenishment and renewal, times of intentionally filling ourselves with God; otherwise we will discover on a hot, draining day that we have no cold water to restore our parched souls; and subsequently, no refreshing drink to offer the souls of youth either.”

This section summarizes this variety of concerns in the categories of (i) disillusionment (ii) Mental Health and Burnout (iii) a lack of spiritual depth and (iv) personality factors.

i. Disillusionment

“The experience of working with hurting teenagers is bittersweet. It is not for the faint of heart” (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: 8705). Kageler (2008: Kindle 264) recognizes that individuals serving in the church will come to witness sooner or later the “dark side of the Christian church and the underside of people’s souls.” Exposure to conflict, injustice, hypocrisy and abuse is unlikely to be absent in any significant tenure in church ministry. For those who entered into youth ministry with an idealized perception of what ministry and the life of the church is like, these wounds may lead to lasting disillusionment. Robbins (2004: 8189) warns that “if we lose a realistic perspective of the church’s holiness, we will become paralysed with discouragement.” It is not new for God’s chosen and called to become disillusioned. The prophet Jeremiah, though knowing he had been called before his birth (Jeremiah 1: 5) entered a time in which he regretted his very birth (Jeremiah 20: 14 – 18) as a result of the pain and struggle of the prophetic role. Novice Youth Pastors may become disillusioned when their idealised expectations of what full time ministry is like turns out very different to the reality of the daily grind of church business. Anthropologist Grierson
(1984: 18) describes a “culture shock” that occurs when a person for the first time enters into the working life of the church and the pain of coming to realise that “a particular congregation is never neat, sometimes barely Christian and only rarely civilised.” An autocratic style in church leaders can affect their subordinates and followers. Nel (2015: 173) comments that the followers of autocratic leaders are “often immature and do little; they can only achieve what the leader is capable of.” Yaconelli (2005: 60) reminisces about his own hopefulness upon entering his first appointment as a Youth Pastor, a job he had taken partly out of anticipation that he would be mentored by the senior pastor whom he admired: “Talk about disillusionment. I never saw him. We hardly conversed; when we did, it was about some youth ministry or upcoming mission trip or the lock-in next week. My pastor was distant, pre-occupied and seldom talked about his own relationship with Jesus.”

ii. Mental Health and Burnout

“Youth ministry is filled with emotion – that is a simple fact” (Nel 2005: 122). Given the emotional requirements of the task of youth ministry, it is important that those in youth ministry maintain positive mental health. An awareness of mental health is important in youth ministry. Nel (2000: 122) notes the tendency of youth ministry to “sometimes attract people who are emotionally unstable”, as does Heitink (1999: 321) in the context of general pastoral ministry. Youth ministry even tends to become “as a means by which some wounded adult can be made to feel special” (Robbins 2004: Kindle 2628). Maas (cf Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 5656-5659) describes a Jesuit priest with the following to say about Youth Pastors entering ministry for their own personal validation: “Youth work...is very appealing because young people are so responsive, so appreciative, and so easily idolize their leaders.” The great temptation of the youth leader, therefore, is to say: “Come to me, come to me.” What they should be saying, of course is, “Go to him, go to him.” Gerali (cf Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 6827) cautions also that “compromising authority for the sake of establishing rapport only ensures that the youth worker will be perceived as a peer and not a role model. Youth workers who operate from this premise are ministering out of their personal need for acceptance and will fail to reach adolescents.” Dean & Foster (1998: 32) describe “the ability to be with youth without becoming one of them” as one sign of healthy adult leadership. When maturity and skill in this area has not been developed, we experience the phenomenon described by Senter III (2001: 46) whereby the Youth Pastor is “more like an overgrown adolescent than a guide to adulthood.”

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Kageler (2008: Kindle 620) makes special mention of Seasonal Affective Disorder which affects many individuals including Youth Pastors. People suffering with this disorder experience depressive symptoms during winter months when the decreased sunlight leads to a recorded production of melatonin. In his observation, this disorder was responsible for a significant amount of distress experienced by Youth Pastors and also has an impact on the morale of volunteers during winter months.

One significant expression of mental health problems in youth ministry is that of burnout. Stanford (1982: 1) describes burnout as “a word we use when a person has become exhausted with his or her profession or life activity.” Higgs (2003: 32) describes the experience as “robbing you of your job, making ministry more of a chore than a privilege.” Heitink (1999: 323) describes how the “the constant appeal, week after week, on the personal faith of the pastor... may turn a joyful occupation into a heavy burden.” Burnout is common in ministry in general as studies shown: “A meta-analysis of relevant studies from the fields of medicine, nursing, psychology, and sociology found that among religious professionals, Protestant clergy experienced the most occupational stress” (Kageler 2010: 11).

Youth ministry is not different in this regard and burnout is frequently mentioned in publications aimed at those in youth ministry. Kageler (2010: 8) points out that unlike depression, burnout is “not listed as a distinct malady in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders”, yet is a significant risk factor in the youth ministry profession. Mashlach (2001: 52) describes burnout as a “a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, and is defined by the three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy.” Some of the symptoms of burnout are “increased turnover, absenteeism, and reduced productivity” (Dougherty 1993: 621-656). Robbins adds to this the marks of “stagnation, frustration and apathy” (Robbins 2004: Kindle 2921). One factor contributing to burnout is any workplace is perceived unfairness or injustice in the workplace (Mashlach 2008: 498; Moliner 2005: 99). In a cross national study on burnout among 155 youth workers in the United States and 98 youth workers in the European Union, Kageler (2010: 18) researched the factors which the respondents indicated as factors leading to burnout in youth ministry. The top three reasons given on both continents were

- Difficult senior pastors
- Feeling isolated or lonely
- Spiritual dryness
Drawing from other studies, Kageler comments that “among those items seen in other burnout studies are feeling isolated and lonely, stress for conflict with “those above”, and doubts about one’s abilities” (Kageler 2010: 11). Robbins (2004: Kindle 2950) lists “vanity” as one of the factors leading to burnout in Youth Pastors, referring with it to three temptations for those in ministry leadership that Nouwen (2002: 102) describes – “the temptation to be relevant, the temptation to be spectacular, the temptation to be powerful.” Nishioker (cf Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 5722 – 5724) points not only to a lack of spiritual input in the lives of youth workers but also a lack of theological reflection as a cause for burn out. He writes: “It’s one of the key reasons burn out is so prevalent in youth ministry—because we neglect to construct a theological framework upon which we can build the various programs and events that make up a balanced ministry with youth and their families.” One of the ways that a Youth Pastor can go about his or her tasks reactively rather than with careful reflection and planning is for him or her to run the youth ministry single-handedly. Dean and Foster compare this scenario to the “burned-out Moses” (Dean & Foster 1998: 90) we encounter in Numbers 11. He is exhausted and overwhelmed with the task that is before him. God leads Moses to identify and recruit a team of leaders to play a role together as agents for God’s plan. Their warning is clear: “Pastors who operate as “lone rangers” tempt professional frustration and vocational infidelity, not to mention the real possibility of failure” (Dean & Foster 1998: 91). Writing in the context of all the offices of ministry in the local church, Nel (2015: 148) offers a relevant word of caution that “the distinctiveness of the service leaders should never be freed from the identity of the congregation as a whole.” A Youth Pastor attempting to do it all on their own will inevitably be excessively busy, a state which Kageler (2008: Kindle 1045) considers a “soul killer.” De Vries (2008: 110) puts it likes this – “What gets sacrificed in the busyness of youth ministry is not our to-do lists but our hearts.” Similarly, Fields (2006: 37) cautions that “while ministry busyness is worn as a badge of honour, unfortunately behind that badge we’ll typically find a damaged spiritual life, a damaged family life and a damaged career.” Dean and Foster (1998: 61) describe the danger of “the need to be all things to all people by addressing admirably every conceivable want and desire.” Beyond the busyness of the Youth Pastor bearing the full responsibility for the youth in their church is the unhealthy dynamic where he or she begins to take on the role of a messiah to the youth rather than the one who points the way to the true messiah, Christ. Maas (cf Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 5660 – 5663) describes such a phenomenon as it relates to burnout in youth ministry: “They can be seduced into thinking that they have what these kids really...
need, and that they are personally responsible for saving them from themselves. When this happens, what the trade calls burn out is not far behind. The distressingly rapid turnover of people in youth ministry has much to do with failing to be content simply with witnessing to the light.” To attempt to accomplish youth ministry tasks on one’s own is not only personally damaging but an ineffective strategy as well given that “long term growth of a youth ministry is directly dependent on the ability of the youth worker to release ministry responsibilities to mature and qualified lay leaders” (Dunn & Senter 1997: 150).

Cavanagh (1986: 76) offers a helpful model for understanding psychological dynamics that impact the minister’s effectiveness and wellbeing. This model examines “four selves” that can operate within a Christian leader and which are influenced by two factors (1) a sense of identity and (2) a sense of intimacy. Robbins (2004: Kindle 2777) summarizes these four selves as follows:

“The Ministerial Self:
I will act the way ministers or youth ministers are supposed to act

The Narcissistic Self:
I will act in whatever way brings me the greatest success, favour and admiration

The Burnout Self:
I will act because I cannot feel, because I am too busy trying to please God to stop and feel

The Healthy Self:
I will not act. I will be who I am called to be in Christ.”

The “healthy self” presents in a Christian leader when he or she has both a strong sense of identity and a strong sense of intimacy with God. It is characterized by “a growing Christ-consciousness leading to a diminished self-consciousness.” Heitink (1999: 312) describes the unique and increasingly difficult process of identity formation in pastors, using the term to refer to all those doing pastoral work in the church. He writes: “They have to learn how choices of faith and psychological factors in their personal life interact, to enable them to be more open for others. They have to solve any tensions that may exist between their church role and their personal expertise. They must be able to represent the church in a more and more secularized society, with all the difficulties this entails. All these factors combined determine the identity of the pastor.”
iii. Lack of Spiritual Depth

Heflin (2009: 9) describes the importance of ensuring one’s own spiritual nurture when engaged in youth ministry – “if we have not first tended to our own spiritual health, we may find we are of little help to others.” Clowney (1964: 4) cautions strongly against allowing this to happen, as he writes: “There is no call to the ministry that is not first a call to Christ. You dare not lift your hands to place God’s name in blessing on his people until you have first clasped them in penitent petition for his grace.” Yaconelli (2005: 56) describes one of the reasons why it is common for Youth Pastors to neglect their own spiritual wellbeing, observing that the “instant gratification of relationships with young people drowns out the delayed gratification of a relationship with Jesus.” Phrased differently, Robbins (2004: Kindle 2841) writes that “we sense God’s presence in the work. But then, little by little, we become so absorbed in the work that we no longer sense God’s presence.” One facing such a predicament would do well to remember that our primary task is to “fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen; for what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4: 16 – 18). This is not a new problem for those in ministry. Over a century ago, W. H. Griffith Thomas (1910: 20) warned of this, writing that “constant service in church affairs tend to spiritual formality, dryness and even deadness which must assuredly affect the spiritual quality of our ministry if not at once and wholly altered.” Kageler (2010: 21) calls for Youth Pastors to be intentional and proactive. He stresses that “personal spiritual formation and soul feeding similarly needs to be a high priority” and that spiritual dryness is a dynamic in youth ministry where the Youth Pastor is in fact in a position to “unilaterally take steps to mitigate.” Yaconelli (2005: 63) offers the following advice to Youth Pastors - “if you’re going to survive spiritually, then take charge of your own relationship with Christ.” The importance of the practices in which a Youth Pastor can tend to his or her own soul is crucial. These include spiritual disciplines of prayer, scripture, meditation, fasting and spiritual communion with others. While loving the young people that they serve, many Youth Pastors “do not make room for a relationship with God as the motivating and sustaining force” (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 8989). Referring to the tendency of Youth Pastors to neglect their own “roots” (spirituality) the authors of The God-bearing Life write – “No wonder people who pastor youth stress out, wear out and burn out faster than people in almost any other form of ministry” (Dean & Foster 1998: 42). Robbins (2004: Kindle) describes the experience of youth ministry that has run spiritually dry as “professional holiness.”

He writes: “What in youth ministry are the marks of professional holiness? Here are a few:
- Spending more time talking about prayer than actually praying
- Private prayers beginning to sound like “nice” public prayers
- Reading the Bible only when preparing a message or Bible study
- Living a life so fast and cluttered there is no time for cultivating the inner life that people don’t see
- “Third-person reading”: Reading not for what God can say to you, but for what you can say when you speak to students
- Inner exhaustion that leads to outer crankiness and cynicism
- A loss of wonder
- Increasing work with decreasing joy”

He goes on to say that the only remedy for professional holiness as being “consistent, intentional pursuit of intimacy with God” (Robbins 2004: Kindle 2859).

iv. Personality Factors

“Aspiring youth workers often appraise their suitability for ministry by the standard of a stereotypical youth ministry personality: wild and crazy, gregarious and funny – we all know the type. In fact, there is no standard personality profile for the perfect youth minister” (Robbins 2004: Kindle 1733). Kageler (2010: Kindle 1129) notes the importance of insight into personality types for its value in “seeing how [your] personality impacts you, and understanding the personality styles of others will give you huge insights in relating to other people, particularly in stressful or confusing situations.” Some would assert that knowing oneself, a factor of Emotional Intelligence, is more important to success than Intellectual Intelligence (IQ). Using a framework by Smalley and Trent (2006) Kageler lists four main personality types:

- **Lions** – dominant quality is leadership
- **Otters** – dominant quality is a fun-loving nature
- **Golden Retrievers** – dominant quality is caring
- **Ants** – dominant quality is attention to detail

He offers the encouragement that “God uses all kinds of people in youth work” (Kageler 2010: Location 1194) and found in a study of 500 Youth Pastors that all four personality types were associated with growth in youth ministries. Each of these four main personality
types bring advantages and disadvantages to youth ministry when entering as a Youth Pastor. Once you understand your personality type, you can become aware of its associated strengths and weaknesses – for example the “lion” (leader) gives a youth ministry purpose and direction but can be insensitive in their decision-making, while the “golden retriever” (caring) has an ability to listen and be present, but maybe find administration a “crushing burden” (Kageler 2010: Location 1247). The “otter” (fun-loving) brings a vibrancy to a youth group but may lack structure, while the “ants” (organized) thrive in attention to detail but run the risk of a youth group which is “too boring.” A Youth Pastor who possesses insight into his or her own personality traits is greater equipped to make wise decisions with regard to delegation of tasks in such a way that his or her strengths are optimally utilized and the potential impact of his or her weaknesses diminished in the involvement of people who possess skills in those areas.

Insight into the personality types of other individuals is an advantage for any Youth Pastor wishing to improve her interpersonal dynamics with others. For example, an understanding of the responses of a senior pastor in a sensitive situation can reduce the potential for conflict in that situation.

Certain personality traits may offer some prediction as to the likelihood of personal satisfaction in ministry. Robbins (2004: Kindle 2930) quotes a pastoral counsellor who cites “a high tolerance for ambiguity.” Nel (2000: 122) calls for balance or spiritual equilibrium as an important quality for a prospective Youth Pastor to possess. In studies on burnout, Kageler (2010: 12) notes that “those clergy with weaker “emotional stability” scores on the Extroversion and Emotional Stability Personality Inventory were very much at risk to leaving the ministry because of burnout.”

2.3.3. Lack of Accountable and Intimate Relationships

“Most youth ministers are lonely, especially if they have been doing it awhile” (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 9091). The loneliness and isolation experienced by Youth Pastors may have many sources. In the aforementioned cross national study by Kageler (2010: 8 – 21) it was found that “isolation or loneliness as a reason for the experience of burnout was named by 57% of single EU and 62% of those in the US.” Dean & Foster (1998: 84) concur, stating that “youth leaders consistently identify personal and professional isolation as a key reason they quit youth ministry.” Powell (Robbins editor 2004; Kindle 2483) suggests that “female youth workers, who often end up serving in smaller churches, might be prone to greater feelings of isolation.” It was found that those whose dominant trait is caring (golden retriever
personality types) were at greater risk of feelings of isolation than the other three types, with 81% of respondents in this category reporting feelings of isolation as opposed to 44% of “lions”, 66% of “otters” and 40% of “ants” (Kageler 2010: Kindle 1375). One factor in feelings of isolation and loneliness is a simple lack of meaningful community with others. Writing to Youth Pastors, Dean (1998: 127) points out that “while many of us help create community among adolescents, professional isolation is a tremendous problem in the field of youth ministry.” She continues to describe the unhealthy dynamic where a youth worker’s entire friendship circle is comprised of the adolescents to whom he or she is ministering. A Carnegie Council of Adolescent Development study “identified a ‘lack of networking’ as one of the most devastating problems facing youth workers” and describe that “the absence of these networks reinforces the image of youth ministry as an alienated, isolated profession” (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: 1998: 42).

Feelings of isolation may also stem from strained family relationships. According to a study of 2100 Youth Pastors by Strommen, Jones and Rahn, 11% of Youth Pastors were “very much” concerned and 12% “quite a bit” concerned about their families getting only leftovers of their time (Strommen, Jones & Rahn as quoted by Kageler 2008: Kindle 1466). Dean and Foster note that “it is a sad commentary on youth ministry – and on ministry in general – that we often pastor other people’s families better than we tend to the soulful needs of our own.” This continues to a description of how often those in ministry “forget that family life is a calling as well.” Intimacy and sexuality are an intrinsic part of every human being including Youth Pastors, and care must be taken to ensure healthy sexual boundaries both for single and for married Youth Pastors.

2.3.4. Lack of Insight in the Church into Youth Ministry

It is widely acknowledged that the church has not demonstrated insight into the importance of youth ministry. Sometimes this has taken the form of norms and practices which subtly re-enforce a message of separateness which send a message to youth (and those who minister to them) that they are less important than the rest of the congregation. At other times it has taken the form of direct hostility and conflict between the generations. This is not a new phenomenon. Nel (Senter III 2001: 7; Strommen 1963: 3) quotes the following comment written by a youth committee over one hundred years ago in 1908: “We look forward to the day when we have only the devil and not also our church fathers to fight.” Senter III (2001: xi) comments that “unfortunately church leaders throughout the 20th Century resisted allowing their young people to become full participants in accomplishing the purposes of the
church.” Youth Pastors know all too well how poorly their role in the church is perceived, as they endure questions and comments devaluing the significance of their work. Rather than demonstrating an understanding of the depth and spiritual importance of ministry to youth, many in the church have historically held to what Black (Senter III 2001: 42) refers to as the “street cleaning heresy” whereby youth are simply occupied and kept “too busy to sin.” Borgman (1987: 72) captures this frustration, stating that the “view point is still prevalent that youth ministry in the church is a stepping-stone to “real” ministry.” Robbins (2004: Kindle 1332) tells the story of a bishop who had responded to Robbins describe himself as a Youth Pastor with the words - “So you’re not really a minister then.” For Dean (2001: 90), “the view that youth ministry is a place where pastoral leaders “do time” until they qualify for “real” ministry is alive and well, thanks to the self-defeating practice of throwing clergy, seminarians and unsuspecting volunteers with little experience and less support into position where adolescents, searching for fidelity, demand more than we have to give.”

Martinson (De Vries 2008: 29) is quoted as follows: “The history of primarily calling inexperienced and inadequately trained young people to do youth ministry reflects a myth that youth ministry is a beginner’s job that doesn’t require much education, experience or skill. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Youth ministry is one of the most demanding ministries – so demanding and frustrating that many pastors and congregational leaders don’t know what to do.” This may in part be due to the fact that youth ministry has only developed as a profession relatively recently. Jones (2001: 216) points out that “even 30 years ago there was no such things as ‘youth ministry veteran’. He also writes: The profession of youth ministry is an amalgam of the fragments from other practices, but it’s so new that there are very few long-standing and time-tested traditions” (Jones 2001: 222).

Churches have also not always demonstrated insight into the importance in youth ministry of integration across the generation. De Vries (2004: 21) refers to the isolation of teenagers from adults as the single strategy which churches have “increasingly (and unwittingly) held to.” He emphasises the need for churches to “connect our kids to nurturing relationships that will last them beyond their teenage years” (De Vries 2004: 56). He describes how “most churches hire youth staff and recruit volunteers only for the short haul, making it sometimes impossible for youth in the church to develop friendships with durable, available adults” (cf Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: 3315). The tendency of churches to isolate young people instead of facilitating relationships with adults is summed up powerfully as follows: “We may assume that spending money on a youth house or a state-of-the-art youth room is exactly what our kids need. But nine times out of 10, such traditional “youth-serving” practices serve only as
a quick fix, patronizing solution, resulting in even more isolation of youth from the very people they need to be around to develop a mature Christian faith.” (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 3315-3318). The practice of keeping teenagers isolated from the rest of the congregation has been described as the “one-eared Mickey mouse” (Cummings-Bond 1998: 76) which is pictured below. This model of youth ministry is one in which the youth have only “marginal contact with the rest of the body of Christ” (Dean & Foster 1998: 30), a model Dean and Foster describe as “notoriously unreliable for fostering ongoing faith.”

Figure 1

Yaconelli (2003: 95) described the effect that such isolation has on young people - “their abandonment by adults have left them feeling lost, fending for themselves.” Gribbon (1990: 68) notes that “young people with little experience of being a part of the whole congregation are most likely to stop participating in the church when their involvement with the peer group ends.” This kind of approach to youth ministry is common. It may in part be due to the “disparagement of older adults who decry a youth’s ability to contribute anything meaningful until she is older” (Heflin 2009: 100). This is reminiscent of what Little (1968: 8) called the “future church heresy” where the youth are valued only insofar as their potential for involvement and leadership in years to come. Some Youth Pastors recognise and resist the isolation of youth, while others play a role in perpetuating the chasm as Heflin (2009: 120) describes: “Some youth ministers have contributed to their ministries disconnectedness in the church by their own lack of involvement in other ministries. Such isolation can lead to minister burnout, dilute the ministry’s effectiveness in influencing the larger church, and prevent potential volunteers from knowing about the ministry.” In other settings, the youth themselves have advocated for greater separation from the body in Christ. Acknowledging this, Clark (1997: 8) comments that “the fight for independence has cost them a meaningful connection with the body of Christ.” Nel (Senter III 2001: 8) describes the impact when churches limit the participation of children and youth, as resulting in a generation of adults “with whom the youths don’t want to identify or associate.” He states furthermore that “this
can be fatal to the identity formation of the youths and their faith development.” It is therefore crucial that churches take steps to reverse and avoid the pattern of isolation of teenagers from the adults in the faith community and set goals with regard to the integration of young people into the life of the church.

3.4 CONCLUSION: WHAT OUGHT TO BE GOING ON?

“Jesus Christ is and will always be the only relevant and redeeming presence that a person could ever experience. When it comes to youth ministry, these constants remain: There is a Creator-God who is on the move to find those who are lost (Luke 15:1f). God’s heart is decisively compassionate toward children (Mark 10:13f). God loves people enough to invade human history via the Incarnation (Philippians 2:5-11). Followers of Jesus Christ are likewise called to love and pursue those whom God loves, and are therefore called to “go” into the world of the young (John 17:18)” (Dean, Clark, Rahn 2011: Kindle 831-837)

“There will always be need for the Church as community called and sent by Jesus. But it will always be called to be a community of inclusive table fellowship and gracious foot washing, a boundary-breaking rather than a boundary-maintaining community, and a community of mission more than a corporation of maintenance.” (Gittins 2008: 198)

3.4.1. The Church Fulfilling its Responsibility to Young People

The MCSA is a context in which the value and dignity of children and youth is affirmed with regard to documentation around matters such as Holy Communion and general resolutions. The emphasis on young people reflects God’s love for children, as revealed in the narrative of scripture and in the witness of Christ who took children in his arms and blessed them. It is vital that the church is intentional about the spiritual formation of young people in its communities both in order to fulfil her inalienable responsibility to her young people and in order to benefit from the valuable contribution to the community that young people bring not only in terms of future development but in their current setting and at their current age and stage of development. Nel (2005: 116) reminds us that “the fact that especially children follow so easily, makes the responsibility of those who lead so much greater.” In spite of this, the MCSA faces an ongoing ambiguous relationship with Youth Pastors in the denomination, with virtually no standard policies or support structures for Youth Pastors. In order to facilitate effective youth ministry in a rapidly changing world, the church must find ways to enter into the world of the adolescents in the community with incarnational ministry that
takes seriously the spiritual, developmental and relational needs of young people. All adults in the community of faith share in the responsibility to provide young people with such a network of relationships, but in a world where sub-cultures rapidly change and external support structures can no longer be taken for granted, it has become necessary for specific gifted and trained individuals to specialize in the field of youth ministry. This person is often the Youth Pastor, called by God to act as a bridge or facilitator between the youth and the rest of the congregation, enabling the congregation to minister to and equip young people as disciples of Christ. She is a leader who does not attempt to do youth ministry alone but allows God to “use the whole body to nurture the parts of the body” (Robbins 2004: 10825). He recruits, trains and motivates a team of adults to form a web of relationships that provide the youth with stability and nurture as they grow in faith within the faith community.

3.4.2. Decreased Turnover/ Increased Tenure among Youth Pastors

Black (Senter III 2001: 51) describes the growing recognition that there is great value in a longer tenure in the ministry of Youth Pastors: “Youth ministry as a stepping stone into “grown up” ministry is losing steam. Youth Ministry is now considered a valid, life-long calling and vocation by growing numbers of churches, which is a welcome trend. Ministers who consider themselves “preachers in waiting” cheat youths out of valuable nurture and ministry that could and should be offered by those who are truly called to this area of service.” Kageler (2008: Kindle 223 - 249) notes personal benefits for Youth Pastors who stay within an appointment for a longer than average period of time. These include:

- an increased credibility among youth and their parents
- the joy of watching young people grow up
- lower stress levels
- The likelihood of an increased salary

De Vries (2008: 126) also offers encouraging words for long term Youth Pastors: “Both the level of satisfaction and the level of effectiveness in ministry dramatically increase with tenure. And, ironically, it is the long-term youth worker who is best positioned to build a youth ministry not dependent on him or her... Persevere. The longer you minister with youth, the more goals you will see accomplished, the more competent and confident you will feel, the more satisfaction you will derive from your relationships with youth and their parents and the stronger will be your sense of purpose and confidence in God and his word”
Similarly, Oestreicher (2005: 50) articulates in his advice to Youth Pastors that a longer tenure is beneficial, stating that: “You’ll grow in your knowledge of ministry and students and the church. You’ll sharpen your speaking, programming and relational skills. You’ll learn from failures and successes. You’ll probably become more efficient at being a youth worker.”

Willimon (2002: 315) asserts that the most productive year for a pastor is their sixth year because it “takes a while for a pastor to gain the trust of his or her people, to communicate a vision that is required for effective ministry.” Whilst he is writing about the experience of ordained pastors in church leadership, one can argue that these points are relevant also to those in youth ministry. He offers further insight about the benefits of a longer tenure in ministry – “it takes about six years for your pastoral chickens to come home to roost, for you to be confronted by your failures, for your programme of ministry to require rejuvenation and growth. Long pastorates generally make wonderfully grounded and centered pastors, while a series of short pastorates are often an indication of a pastor who has not had to develop the resources for maturation of ministry.”

A longer tenure of a Youth Pastor is likely to involve benefits both for the Youth Pastor and for the local church where he or she serves as his or her skills improve, trust develops and stability is provided both for the young people and for the team of adults under the leadership of the Youth Pastor. On the other hand, it can cause significant damage to the youth ministry of a local church when a Youth Pastor’s tenure is disrupted through negative dynamics such as burnout and conflict. Other difficulties faced by Youth Pastors include feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, spiritual dryness, unrealistic expectations and burnout.
Chapter 4: Listening to Stories

4.1. METHODOLOGY

In order to gather qualitative empirical data related to the departure of Youth Pastors from the MCSA within the last four years, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with a random sample of individuals who have served in as Youth Pastors in the MCSA within the past four years. Geographically, I chose to focus on the Central District as well as the Highveld & Swaziland District of the MCSA, which includes Johannesburg and surrounding areas. The reasons for selecting Johannesburg as the primary geographical location are as follows:

- Johannesburg has a number of suburbs with an affluent demographic, in a position to hire Youth Pastors
- There are a high number of young people living in Johannesburg
- It is outside of my own location for ministry therefore allowing me to undertake a more objective study than would have been the case if interviewing Youth Pastors in Pretoria, where I am involved in several churches

4.1.1. Selection

In order to ascertain which individuals in the MCSA have served as Youth Pastors in Johannesburg within the last four years, I sourced copies of the minutes of Synod from these two districts from 2012 – 2015 in the archives section of the Methodist Connexional Office in Johannesburg. The relevant information was recorded in Section 6 of each Synod Year Book. It was established that there are 141 societies within these two districts. Over a four-year period from 2012 – 2015, a total of thirty-five Youth Pastors were employed by societies. Twenty-five of these Youth Pastors departed from their appointments during this time. Ten Youth Pastors were still serving in their positions at the time. I decided to interview five individuals who had departed from their position as well as five individuals actively serving as Youth Pastors. To this end, I listed the “active” Youth Pastors in alphabetical order and the “departed” Youth Pastors in alphabetical order. To obtain a sample of five participants in each group, I selected every second “active” Youth Pastor and every fifth “departed” Youth Pastor. I was able to interview nine of the ten subjects identified in this way. One individual
was unwilling to participate. Therefore, I interviewed the person prior to this individual on the alphabetical list. The sample group can be described as follows:

**ACTIVE YOUTH PASTORS**

PARTICIPANT A  White  male  25-30 years old  
PARTICIPANT B  White  female  45-50 years old  
PARTICIPANT C  Black  male  25-30 years old  
PARTICIPANT D  Black  male  25-30 years old  
PARTICIPANT E  Black  male  30-35 years old  

**DEPARTED YOUTH PASTORS**

PARTICIPANT F  Black  male  25-30 years old  
PARTICIPANT G  White  female  30–35 years old  
PARTICIPANT H  White  male  25–30 years old  
PARTICIPANT I  Black  male  20–25 years old  
PARTICIPANT J  White  male  30-35 years old  

The random sample process resulted by chance in racial diversity, whereby 50% were white and 50% were black. There were no coloured Youth Pastors represented in the sample group although it is noted that there are at least two coloured Youth Pastors actively serving in these two districts. The sample group was dominated by male participation in the random selection. Of the thirty-five Youth Pastors identified as having served in these two districts over the past four years, 45% women. Only 20% of the sample group were women. Thus, it must be mentioned that the interviews may be more representative of the experience of male Youth Pastors in the Central and the Highveld & Swaziland District of the MCSA.

### 4.1.2. Interviews

Each individual who was selected was contacted by me personally and received a letter explaining the purpose of the research and requesting their participation while offering assurance that their privacy would be respected. The selected method for collecting data was in the form of a semi-structured interview with each of these individuals which was recorded and transcribed. The transcribed interviews were then analysed and the findings of their collective narrative compiled in this report.
4.2. OUTCOME OF THE INTERVIEWS

The interviews were semi-structured, consisting of open-ended questions which had been compiled with the theoretical background to the problem in mind. The same set of questions (Addendum A) formed the basis of all the interviews although the flow of conversation was flexible.

4.2.1. Basic Information

i. Tenure

Table 1: Tenure in Youth Ministry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More Than 4.9 Years</th>
<th>Fewer Than 4.9 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEPARTED</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTIVE</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the time of the interviews, the “actively” participants had served for an average 4.8 years. The “departed” participants had served in their position for an average of 5.15 years before they left. There was a wide range in tenure across the sample group from 2 years to 10 years. The average tenure was 4.9 years. While the initial distinction was between those who were active and those who had departed, it became clear that the tenure was actually longer in those who had departed. Therefore, the distinction between “active” and “departed” was not adequate for the purpose of comparing long and short tenure among Youth Pastors. The participants were divided into four categories in order to provide some insight into their status and tenure in the church:

- Long Tenure Departed (LD)  Departed after 4.9 years (2 participants)
- Short Tenure Departed (SD)  Departed prior to 4.9 years (3 participants)
• Long Tenure Active (LA)  Active for more than 4.9 years (2 participants)
• Short Tenure Active (SA)  Active for less than 4.9 years (3 participants)

ii. Average Age

Table 2: Average Age of Participants and Ministers in Each Category

The average age in the sample group was 29.3 years old and the majority of the sample group would be considered “Generation Y.” The average age of the senior or supervisory ministers were of a wide age range from 38 years old to 64 years old. The average age was 48.3 years old which would place them, on average, between Generation X and Baby Boomers.

iii. Formal Education

iv. Table 3: Academic Qualifications
Six of the ten participants are currently progressing through a theological degree/diploma or have made progress toward those theological subjects which are required for Local Preaching in the Methodist Church. Only one of the participants has made no progress toward a diploma or degree in Theology. Three of the ten participants have completed a Bachelor of Theology degree – all three of whom completed Honours. Two active and one departed Youth Pastor participated in practical youth ministry training courses, namely J-Life (one participant) and the 4G programme (two participants). Three of the ten participants have completed degrees or postgraduate qualifications in other disciplines in addition to their progress in a theological qualification.

4.2.2. Answering the Questions
The following section is a summary of the answers given in response to the questions in the interview. Addendum B offers specific information on the number of participants offering each of the various answers given. In several instances, answers offered by the participants are grouped together into similar concepts even when the words and phrases used are not exactly the same. For example, “leading youth to Christ” and “being a pastor to youth” were grouped among other similar phrases as “Facilitating a Faith Journey.”

i. Youth Pastor’s Perception of the Role
How would you describe your understanding of your role as a Youth Pastor?

Table 4: Youth Pastor Role Perception

In response to this question, one participant (LA) described the role of a Youth Pastor by comparing it to that of a minister, saying “we deal with things just as hairy as they do if not
worse sometimes. In actual fact we do everything a minister does except sacraments.” The most common answers with similar answers grouped together were (1) facilitating a faith journey (2) introduction or oversight of youth programmes (3) empowering youth as leaders (4) delivering the gospel or preaching (5) reaching out to unchurched youth and (6) families/integration of youth into the community.

Facilitating a Faith Journey
Facilitating a relationship with God was mentioned in some form by seventy percent of the participants, each stating it in a different way such as “lead young to encounter Christ”, “facilitate a faith journey for children” or “help youth find their identity in Christ.” While all five of the actively serving Youth Pastors mentioned this aspect, it was only mentioned by two in the departed category.

Introduction or Oversight of Programmes
In the departed category, the most frequently mentioned aspect of the role was the introduction or the oversight of programmes.

Developing Youth as Leaders
One participant (SA) described this aspect as follows - “The purpose of your youth ministry is raising young leaders the next generation for your church.” Another participant (LD) stated that “My aim was to build up people empowered to do ministry without me.”

Reaching Out to Youth Outside of the Church
Three out of the ten participants displayed an emphasis on mission, describing the importance of focussing not only on the “churched” youth whose parents attend but also – perhaps more so – on those young people outside the church. One participant (SD) stated: “I believe that I was called not to serve under the umbrella of the church and only serve the Methodist people but serve each and every person.” The same participant also stated - “Look at exteriors not only interior, because we believe that the interior is okay, those who are coming to church I believe that are on the right path already, it’s those who are not coming that we need to concentrate on as well and make the church accommodate them and be welcoming to them. But also be able to invest in them. And I know it’s like investing into thin air - you don’t see it, but that’s the thing it’s not for you to see.” This participant also said and “I believe that the church has been forged to serve the greater community and not only focus within the church wide groups.” Another participant (SA) stated that “we should be building youth to
become disciples and evangelists in their social circles not force them to be removed from their social circles behind the walls of a church.” The participant also stated the following—“I believe that we should be taking church to young people not expecting young people to come to the church.”

Integration of Youth into the Church Community
One participant (SA) included integration into the local church as a part of the role of a Youth Pastor, saying “for us to have a sustainable church in the near future today, we need to get young people interested in being a part of the life of the church.”

ii. Summarise Your Story
Would you mind to tell me your story as a Youth Pastor in the MCSA?

Table 5: Story-Telling

One of the earliest questions in the interview was simply a request for the participant to share his or her story as a Youth Pastor in the MCSA. In general, the stories revealed an experience consisting of both positive and negative dynamics. One participant spoke of “ups and downs.” Another described the journey as “a blessing and a hurt.” Yet another described youth ministry as “incredibly frustrating but rewarding.” Six participants described difficulties, conflict or negative generational dynamics as they shared their story. In this case, the Long Tenure participants raised twice as many comments about negative interpersonal dynamics in the telling of their stories than the Short Tenure participants. The following aspects were discussed in the telling of their stories:
The Call

"Because you are driven by a passion for what you love and knowing that alone will make you quit any job, because you are content doing what you are called to” (LA)

Most of the participants clearly described a sense of being called by God. This included all four “Long Tenure” participants. The six “short tenure” participants also made mention of a call, but not all of them referenced a call to youth ministry specifically. For example, one participant (SD) stated only that he is called to the ordained presbytery ministry of the church and did not describe a call to youth ministry. Another (SD) explained that he sensed a call to apply for a vacancy in his own local church, but explained that he had never considered this to be a long term calling: “I was always aware that this wasn’t what I was going to do for the rest of my life, certainly not youth work.” Another participant (SD) described his call as follows – at a youth group function in which he was a member, he had felt called to share a message with the young people. He recounts that he informed his minister about it and the minister’s response was “go for it.”

The long tenure participants articulated clear testimony of their calling in the recounting of their stories. For example, one participant (LA) shared the story of her call being affirmed through prayerful discernment: “The more I prayed about it the more excited I got and the more scared I got at the same time.”

The Interview and Discernment Process

Three of the four long tenure participants shared a detailed account of their interview or placement. One participant (LD) explained that she was appointed as a Youth Pastor during an internship year, when her own Youth Pastor departed. She states – “I fell into that role quite by accident.” This participant then describes a moment of spiritual awareness among all who participated in her interview process. For another participant (LA), the interview process included a psychometric examination to determine their vocational readiness and suitability – or as the participant phrased it (tongue in cheek) “to prove that I was normal.” Another participant (LD) was asked to bring his guitar to the interview to demonstrate the leading of worship. This same participant explains how he attended various other interviews but had not discerned God calling him to those churches.

Some of the participants initially worked part time in youth ministry and part time in other fields. Two of the participants explained that they soon came to realise that youth ministry would require their full time attention – or as one participant (LA) put it – “it was walk through the door or walk away, so I walked through the door. I gave up a 25-year career.”
Cultural Dynamics

Several participants described cultural and racial dynamics as playing a significant role in their story as a Youth Pastor in the MCSA. One participant (LA) serving in a traditional black Methodist Church described the initial challenge of introducing youth ministry in a context where a “Youth Pastor” was not a well-known concept. In the group of actively serving participants, three out of four participants shared some way in which racial or cultural dynamics affected them in their role as a Youth Pastor. Two participants (SA) who are black and serving in a predominantly white context made these comments:

- “I would see things given the perspective, given my perspective as a young black lad. There are things I always would see differently.” (SA)
- “Firstly I had to adapt. Learn how things are done. Secondly I had to also learn new cultures and people cultures which was quite interesting because people are not the same and the more you get to understand how people are doing things” (SA)

One participant working in a cross-cultural context was comfortable with the dynamics of the community but expressed concern that his fiancé may not “find a place” in that congregation as a result of cultural differences. Another participant (LD) described a situation whereby he was asked to resign from a position on the basis of his race. The same participant also shared concerns that his attempts to candidate for the ordained ministry were obstructed as a result of his race.

Cross cultural dynamics were also expressed in positive terms. One participant (SD) explained that “you get to grow as an individual” as you learn to understand differences. Another participant (SA) explained how his background as a black Youth Pastor gave him the ability to see contentious issues, such as “fees must fall” protests, from the perspective of both the white congregation members with whom he had a pastoral relationship and that of his own perspective as a young black man passionate about justice. A white participant (LA) expressed a desire to fight the perception that Youth Pastors are a “white church commodity.” This participant attempted to use district and Connexional platforms in the MCSA to assist black churches who want to develop youth ministry programmes outside of the traditional Wesley Guild. Two participants (LA) criticised the practice whereby the Wesley Guild caters for a wide age group from young teenagers to adults in their thirties.
Denominational Dynamics

Several participants raised frustrations about the politics and systems of the wider church. For at least three of them the lack of a clear study pathway was a frustration. One participant (SD) shared – “it was difficult to be motivated to study without any reason from the church to do so - keeping my studies on track for example which was my own responsibility clearly, but … he didn’t give, I didn’t have a reason within the church to make an effort here so it was difficult to find the motivation.” Another participant (SD) complained that there was “no direction on what to study.” While commending the recent endorsement of the 4G programme, another participant (SD) shared there had been no such facility when he became a Youth Pastor so he, as a Methodist, “had to go to a non-denominational training facility.” While the participant did not regret this experience, it may be worth noting that this participant struggled with finding a place theologically in the Methodist Church during the tenure of his ministry. The participant also expressed frustration that an Honours degree from another institution was not accredited by the seminary of the MCSA. Three participants described the process of candidature for the ordained ministry as arduous or difficult. For one participant (LD) there was a “serious blockage” with regard to his applications being turned down for seemingly insignificant reasons. Another participant (SA) felt that the practice of sending candidates to the Seth Mokitimi Seminary in Pietermaritzburg for training was not pastoral or raising leadership, but was “just passing responsibility to somebody else.” A third participant (SA) mentioned that he had considered candidature toward ordained ministry, but changed his mind when exposed to too many things he didn’t like about the way that people were treated – “by spending time in the church I saw things that made me not want to pursue a full time career in the church.” One participant (SD) shared that “one tends to not want to be a part of the politics of the wider church.” One participant (LA) said – “there was nothing to protect me from the church or protect the church from me. There isn’t. We’re not covered by law for discipline by the Book of Order, we are covered by labour law, if you look at the Methodist employee guideline my contract is the same as the caretaker, the secretary, the gardener.” This participant expressed a sense of call to make a difference on a denominational level, saying “one of the things that I felt God was saying to me was that I can’t leave youth ministry the way I found it, and so the struggle has been over the outside of society and circuit into district and conference to try and make people aware.” On the other hand, two participants positively described the opportunity in the wider church to meet, share with and get to know other people in ministry. One participant (SD) described it as follows – “Having spent time with ministers having to share their ideologies and spending times with
The gap you can take people’s lessons from, you know. Joining in their conversation even having shared their experiences it’s, it’s kind of opened the eyes to the wider church.” A participant (SA) who joined the MCSA after growing up in a Pentecostal context frequently referred to differences in approach between the two denominations, especially with regard to the church’s attitude toward young people. For example, he stated - “I don’t see (their needs) being catered to within a traditional Methodist church context because they’re too concerned with rituals and traditions and going through the motions.” One participant (SD) who worked in the corporate world prior to entering youth ministry had the following to say about the adjustment to youth ministry - “It was very different to what I was used to and a lot less structure. I was my own boss, and that was a challenge getting used to and figuring out what it meant. Arriving to a church that has a very strong Youth Ministry already... it was a question of now trying to find my place and what I could contribute to that.”

### iii. Reasons for Departure

Tell me about the primary reasons for your departure from your position

*Table 6: Reason for Departure*

The participants who have departed from their positions were asked to give the primary reasons for their departure. While each participant’s reason for departure was unique, the most common answers with similar answers grouped together were (1) difficulties with the minister (2) no room to grow (3) inadequacy/ making a difference? (4) financial needs (5) needed more intellectual stimulation.
minister (2) limited room to grow (3) inadequacy or being unsure whether the ministry is making a difference (4) financial needs and (5) needing more intellectual stimulation.

**Relationship with Minister**

As participants told their stories it became clear that the participant’s relationship with the supervising minister critically affected the participants’ sense of satisfaction and support. This was particularly clear in light of the impact it had when the minister who was active in appointing the Youth Pastor was stationed elsewhere and a new minister took their place. Several participants described their ministry journey as if divided into different “chapters” – describing a positive experience over the course of a few years with one minister, followed by a negative experience when a new minister arrived. One participant (SA) recounted a fellow Youth Pastor’s drastic change in job satisfaction and happiness in such a situation, describing it as follows – “We had coffee and he was saying to me since <Name> was no longer a senior pastor, things are not going well, and this was 3 months down the line I might even be chopped or I might resign, so this is how it is.”

One participant (SA) described how one’s relationship with the senior minister influences the resources allocated to you – “so you’re in bed with the minister or you don’t get money from him and then it gets very difficult to do anything because how are you supposed to do... you know... but if you’re on good terms with the minister... it becomes a very personal and personality driven ministry and that extends into all aspects.” The same participant said “if you are on bad terms with your minister then your minister is not going to equip you properly.” Similarly, another participant (SA) stated that “your position is as good as you and your relationship of your minister is. If he doesn’t like you, or if you’ve got issues then you’re next possible thing is exit.” Another participant (SA) also shared that “if you don’t have a good relationship with the minister whose working alongside you it’s very difficult to keep motivated.”

**Limited Room for Growth**

One participant (LD) cited as their reason – “first and foremost I think I’d reached a ceiling in terms of what I was able to do, so I started that ministry with two children, so I finished that ministry with about 450 children... I had said to my minister – “I feel like I can do this ministry with my eyes closed”, which I feel was a dangerous position for me to be in because it meant that I no longer really needed God because it was something I was just able to do.”

Another participant (SD) said that “there wasn’t really room for experience and I just deeply felt that there wasn’t any growth possible.” This participant also said that – the minister didn’t lead me to try and actually explore what youth ministry could be like.”
Inadequacy/ Doubting the Impact of Youth Ministry

The participant (SD) who was unsure of whether he was making a difference qualified his statement in this way – “the sense of people saying everything is great, we love your preaching, we love our ministry but then looking at their lives and saying... have I actually made a difference because it feels like they are just enjoying coming to church and hearing a message that makes them feel warm and fuzzy inside, but actually have they been able to encounter God in a deeper way in a sense of their life? Have they felt a need to respond to his love in some way? That was not... I guess if I’d seen more of that I would have been more drawn to stay in that environment.” The participant explained that his current employment in the field of corporate training provided him with “an opportunity to make a difference in my country and to develop people so it kind of felt like I was still able to do what I was doing but just in a different context perhaps with more influence.”

iv. The Effect of Youth Pastor’s Departure on Youth Ministry

How do you feel that the youth ministry in the congregation was affected by your departure?

Table 7: The Effect of Departure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reported Youth Ministry Decline</th>
<th>Participant Maintained Contact After Departure</th>
<th>Described an Active Reversal of Their Efforts After Departure</th>
<th>An Unsuitable Successor (or No Successor)</th>
<th>Had Tried to Build a Sustainable Ministry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long Tenure</td>
<td>Short Tenure</td>
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<td>Participant</td>
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The participants who had departed were asked how they feel that the youth ministry in their churches was affected by their departure. Almost all reported a decline in the youth ministry immediately following their departure. The answering of this question brought forth strong emotional words and phrases:
“I gave eight years of my life to this thing, worked really hard to get it to where it was and I don’t really want it to die. And so I think it has probably been the most heart-breaking part of the process has been watching this thing kind of try to find a new way to forward without anybody really there to lead it.” (LD)

“The saddest part was that some of the kids actually didn’t attend, the youth there where I was because of me not being there” (SD)

“It’s been quite heart-breaking, you know. I spent three days in Johannesburg last week and caught up with some of the young adults who I mentored for a long time into leadership positions. And they tried for two and a half years to keep the ministry going on a volunteer basis, and the only ministry that’s still going is their Sunday morning teen church, but that’s not very similar - its changed quite a lot from the way I used to do things and left it in their hands.” (LD)

Several mentioned that they had tried to develop youth ministry that would be sustainable after they left, yet saw decline nevertheless. Some participants described the decline as being related to the loss of relationship after their departure.

“Are we going to be affected by him leaving? Yes. of course, because this is obviously our relationships that we’ve had, and the spirit that we’ve had altogether. That got to them” (SD)

“In youth ministry you often find kids who are not attached to their parents, but actually come as individuals, and so with those kids their relationship with their Youth Pastor is their only, the Youth Pastor becomes the only adult that they know in the church. Like take Friday youth. Friday youth was mostly it was almost a seeker evening, it was mostly kids who did not attend church regularly on a Sunday or went to churches that did not have um, youth programmes that kind of accommodated them. And so that too was cut off. Because it became more of a faith-club for kids who are already in the church so through their parents. So I think those relationships were lost.” (SD)

“So nothing has changed in the way, the programming, nothing has changed in terms of the structure, the physical venue, the way in which a service is run none of that is changed, but what has changed is the fact that there isn’t a key person who the kids can identify with who is consistent, week after week after week they are there... and that you can build trust in them and they and be someone you can talk to.” (LD)
Several participants described the failure of the church to appoint a suitable successor after the departed. In some cases, there was no person appointed to take over from the Youth Pastor. In at least two cases, participants felt that the person who took over was actively trying to reduce or reverse their efforts in the youth ministry.

- “If someone’s been watching you as you do youth ministry and they think “I would have rather done this in this way, I would have answered this particular question in this way, I would have rather had a curriculum that was filled with more of this kind of theology”. The minute you step out obviously a reset button is pressed. And it is no continuity, that I think could have a tremendous, that could affect in a negative way going forward unfortunately.” (SD)
- “Let’s not blame the whole Methodist Church for one church’s mistake, but the leadership at (church name) were quite aggressive in – I’m just going to call it as it is – aggressive in breaking down what I tried to build up.” (LD)

v. Possibility of Departure Among Active Participants

Are you considering leaving your position within the next 12 months (if so, why)?

Table 8: Reasons for Possible Departure

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<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Considered Departure</th>
<th>Not Considered Departure</th>
<th>Obedience/God’s Call</th>
<th>Opportunity to Grow</th>
<th>Cultural/Family Dynamics</th>
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Actively serving participants were asked to describe the reasons why they might be considering departure within the next twelve months. Four out of five active participants said that they were considering departure. The primary reasons were (1) should an opportunity to
grow arise (2) obedience to God’s call and (3) cultural dynamics. Some of the participants seemed to offer an ambiguous answer as if torn by a conviction to stay and a desire to leave. For example:

- “I don’t have plans to leave, but at the same time I’m not against the idea of being given an opportunity” (SA)
- “My spiritual journey so far this year has been telling me that this year is going to be my last year here. How that looks and why it looks I cannot tell you but whenever I’m prepping stuff I’m feeling God saying this is your last...” (LA)
- “Willingly any Youth Pastor within an African context will jump with an opportunity that comes... not in the next twelve months. I feel I have a responsibility to finish what I started... So until such time as I’m done with that group that I think I can respond to opportunities out there that will allow me to grow further and be the person to impact much wider as I could.” (LA)

vi. Interpersonal Dynamics
What interpersonal dynamics have affected you most in your ministry and why?

Table 9: Interpersonal Dynamics Affecting the Youth Pastor

Participants were asked to describe what interpersonal dynamics affected them most in their role as a Youth Pastor. The most common answers, with similar answers grouped together, were (1) inadequate insight and recognition of youth ministry (2) difficulties with the minister and (3) unclear expectations. Other interpersonal dynamics which were mentioned
by only one participant each were difficult peer dynamics, positive peer dynamics and racial
dynamics.

Inadequate Insight and Recognition of Youth Ministry

Five participants described a struggle with church leadership that did not demonstrate any
insight into youth ministry or did not take the Youth Pastor seriously. One participant (SA)
described it saying – “you’re really just a glorified M.C.” Another participant (SA)
summarised his perception of how church leaders view Youth Pastors – “you are a Youth
Pastor, you take care of young people, there is nothing serious that you can offer to the life of
the church.” One participant (SD) also gave a perception of what people think - “Hey, you’re
a Youth Pastor – not like a senior minister” meaning you’re not playing much of a role.”
This participant ended his interview with an assertion that “It’s not a Mickey Mouse sort of
position – you’re dealing with people.” Another participant (SA) described a desire that
ministers would no longer see Youth Pastors as “a child who is experimenting.”
Another participant (LA) shared the frustration that occurred when people in the church did
not understand the role of a Youth Pastor - “I was seen as the office staff so if the secretary
had to go to the bank, I had to come and sit and watch the phone. But then I have pastoral
visit to go do or a kid in hospital or something now I have to reschedule that so I can watch
the phone.” One participant (SA) describes a similar experience whereby the role of a Youth
Pastor was not understood – “I became a victim of this assumption that anything that is youth
related, the Youth Pastor will do. There is always the assumption that if you’re a Youth
Pastor, you definitely can help with social media.” Another participant (SD) described a
sense of not being listened to – “anything that I put on the table it wasn’t really considered,
so that changed – I just thought “oh well, I might as well not say anything because whatever
I say nobody listens to it.” Another participant (LD) shared the following – “I didn’t always
feel like I was heard, or I felt I was heard I didn’t feel I was listened to which is a big
difference.” A participant (LD) who has since taken up an appointment in another
denomination describes how he has felt far more recognised and taken seriously in his new
denomination. He describes it in terms of the attitude with which people pray for the pastoral
staff in his church saying – “When people pray for you they pray for our pastors - they don’t
pray for our senior minister and – oh yes, we’ve got a Youth Pastor and Children’s Pastor
here too.”
**Minister Difficult to Get Along With**

The three participants who answered this question by describing their minister as difficult to get along with or controlling all fall into the category of Departed. Two participants stated that they had serious theological differences with their minister which formed a part of their reason for departure. For one participant (LD) the concern was general and related to the fact that the minister had not ever actually completed a diploma in theology. For another participant (LD) the disagreements resulted from the fact that he was theologically conservative and the minister was “aggressively liberal” – in particular this participant had concerns about the homosexual debate. He said – “we didn’t agree theologically and I started to question my place and my space because of that.” Two participants (SD and LD) indicated a personal struggle with the minister’s theological stance. Two participants described ministers or church leadership as being insecure or easily threatened. For one participant (SA) the complaint was that “they’re almost afraid to allow Youth Ministry to really take off in a sense... afraid that if they raise up a young leader that leader is going to like surpass them or undermine them or overshadow them.” The other participant (DS) described it as follows – “His weakness was just complete insecurity. He was so desperate to have positive things said about him and could not handle if that was said to somebody else so that influenced the way he led, so he would lead almost out of resentment at times. And that would result in him shooting people down or bullying, breaking people down who didn’t agree with something he said or who had gone against him... I actually did receive a bit of support... but it was personal support when I wasn’t um, going against his will or when other people in the church weren’t making comments about how great I was without reciprocating for him.” There were other dynamics described relating to the Youth Pastor’s relationship with the minister. One spoke about the complexity of working under a married ministerial couple which was not necessarily negative but did result in some unhealthy dynamic where they developed a parental role toward the staff.

**Ministerial Transitions**

In the MCSA, it is standard practice for ministers to move from one church to another every five years. Two participants mentioned a change in ministerial leadership over the course of their position. For one participant (LA), the change was perceived in a positive light and brought hopefulness. For another participant (LD), the change was a negative experience and described as follows – “the leadership structure changed. It was very much top down and he said this is how we would go. And some of the society stewards struggled with that, as
pastoral staff we struggled with that, because it was either his way or you would leave.” This participant went on to describe him as a dictator and stated the following - “he was the team manager and everybody else just had to bow down to him and his ways and I said to him I struggle with that.”

Interpersonal Relationships with the Youth
Several participants described positive personal relationships with the youth themselves. One participant (SA) said “we just became one strong family.” Another participant described the experience of watching the young people grow – “I’ve known a lot of them over the years, the scary thing is I’ve even married some of them!” One participant (SA) described the dynamic of taking over from a strong predecessor – “I came to a church where they had a Youth Pastor who was with them for quite a very long time now they were used to and attached to him. So, I had to come in now as a new person and try by all means to get them to get used to me and then work with them.” One participant (LD) captured the importance of relationships in youth ministry with the following statement - “the person who is leading, the person who is up front does become very intimately tied in the way in which young people see God and relate to God so those relationships are critical and I know if I look back I... part of the reason I am in ministry today is because of the relationship I had with Youth Pastors and the way I looked up to them and the way they engaged with me and kind of went above and beyond what they probably needed to do – or certain what they were being paid to do.” The participants were not specifically asked to describe young people or their needs, but some comments about young people were made in the interviews. One participant described the youthful generation as passionate, referring to protests over tertiary fees as an example. He said – “if you give them something to be passionate about, you can see them.” This participant also described the ability of young people to sense whether the church is sincere in their ministry toward them, saying, “Young people see straight through the rubbish and the lies.” The same participant described his perception of what young people want from the church as “a place where they can belong a place where they can find friendship and community.” Another participant (SD) describes the importance of proclaiming the gospel to young people by saying – “I believe that you know what if we don’t take this to young people in the church, they just going to stray in life.”
Friendships and Peer Dynamics

Several participants referred to friendships and social dynamics when asked what interpersonal dynamics most affected them in their role as a Youth Pastor. For one participant (SD), the most pertinent interpersonal dynamic was the complexity of having leadership over people who were also his friends. He describes the dynamic and the impact it had on himself:

“Probably the biggest challenge is having to balance the fact that your whole life is in this church so your friendships are there um... and then the people that you are also working with, and so at least on a couple of occasions people let me down, then it wasn’t only about them letting me down in a ministry context it was also a personal context, so the challenge was always to be able to sort of if I can use the word “rebuke” – it’s such a strong word, but trying to you know, guide people on the right way and you know deal with the fact that maybe they’re doing something that’s inappropriate in the context of working with youth and this is my friend as well... So the accusation is – “But I’ve known you so long, how can you treat me like this?” So that brought a lot of strain and probably some of the most draining times was dealing with those type of situations. But aside from that the funny thing about it is that was the minimum of times or minimum of interactions which I suppose ended up having the biggest impact.”

The same participant described youth ministry as follows – “you tend to feel very lonely. You’re in here on your own.” Another participant (SD) also seems to describe a sense of loneliness or isolation, saying that “It’s just been myself and my wife that’s been there to support throughout.” Several participants described themselves as building positive relationships with various individuals in the course of their ministry. One participant (LD) describes an era in their tenure when the church was relatively new and did not yet have its own building. During that time the pastoral staff team had “a lot of interconnectedness, a lot of time was spent on relationship.” This participant described a positive relationship between themselves and others on the staff team – the “second tier” leadership group who all fell under the leadership of the ministers. Describing those relationships, the participant says of the team – “it was very supportive of each other and great team dynamics so if you were struggling and I could help there wasn’t even a question around - I was going to give you everything I have to get you through that.” Another participant (SD) describes a period of time in which he and another Youth Pastor were employed together in one society and worked well together, seeing great fruit in the youth ministry.
vii. Youth Pastor’s Expectation of Minister

What do you expect from your supervising minister?

Table 10: Youth Pastor’s Expectation of Minister

The participants were asked to describe their own expectations of a senior minister. The most common answers, with similar answers grouped together, were (1) provide personal support (2) provide guidance for ministry (3) to lead without dominating or micro-managing (4) to acknowledge his/her own faults (5) visibility and involvement in the youth ministry and (6) to be well studied and of sound doctrine.

The Expectation for Personal Support

The most commonly stated expectation which was stated in some form by nine of the ten participants was that of personal support for the Youth Pastor and taking an interest in his or her personal life, in other words “somebody who could mentor me and encourage me and make me want to go into ministry.” Sharing a positive story, one participant (SA) shared - “he’s given me an opportunity to, even go and tell him “listen I am actually struggling with this particular sin.” Another participant (SA) describes his expectation of a minister as a mentor saying “my understanding of how a minister should be related to a Youth Pastor or anyone who is coming up to pastor a church would be to really do everything they can to grow and build that guy.” One participant (LA) who has felt unsupported in most of their time in ministry described their expectation by saying “in a perfect world I would want a minister to be pastoral.” Another participant (SA) said – “I expect him to take the relationship out of the formalities and get to a point where he also knows personal stuff,
because it is only when I am fine that I can perform well, and when I am not fine and someone doesn’t care enough to know how am I doing.” Another participant (LA) similarly says “I expect the senior ministry to support me as a Youth Pastor.” One participant goes as far as to say that they would appreciate it is the minister “check on me when I am not saying something is wrong” – in other words proactive pastoral support and care. Another participant said – “when I am not fine and someone doesn’t care enough to know how am I doing - how is my family doing, if I’ve got a girlfriend is everything fine - then next thing I’m coming to work and then sleeping or not performing because I am not okay. So my expectation is that we have a relationship that is beyond work.” From the category of those who have departed from youth ministry, one participant (SD) shared that his expectation was that a minister would “guide them in life in general, mentor them.” Another participant (SD) stated his desire that the senior minister would “be able to look out for me in a sense make sure I’m looking after myself, my family life, my spiritual life.” On the other hand, while another participant (LA) did feel that personal support was to be desired, that the Youth Pastor should seek spiritual guidance from someone outside of their work environment. Two participants specifically stated that a minister ought to care for their own staff before caring for the congregation. One participant (LD) asserted that “if the staff are happy, the congregation will be happy.” The active participant who had been serving the longest tenure actually raised a question about whether it is the role of the supervising minister to provide spiritual support, stating – “I don’t believe so much spiritual direction because I don’t think having somebody in your working environment for direction is good, I think it needs to be somebody who’s outside objective, who’s not involved, because they can hold you accountable in ways that people here might not be able to.”

Ministry Guidance
The second most commonly stated expectation was mentioned by six of the ten participants – to guide the Youth Pastor in the task of Youth Ministry. For one participant (SA) this would take the form of sharing where the church is going. Another participant (LA) asked for “just a little bit of direction on where we are going... Don’t just leave them to do as they want. They don’t always know.”

Leadership Without Domination
One active participant and four departed participants highlighted their own expectation that the minister should not dominate or micromanage them, or stated that they expect to be given
freedom. The expectation to not dominate was the third most common expectation and appeared more often among departed Youth Pastors than it did in the group of actively serving Youth Pastors. One participant (SA) asked for "the opportunity to make mistakes" and stated that "you’ve got to actually just give the Youth Pastor or the person you’ve appointed to the ministry the scope to lead the ministry and them support in whatever way you can." The departed Youth Pastors made the following statements when asked about their expectations of a senior minister:

- “Expectation would be to guide, not to dominate. You give proper guidance, give proper doctrine but don’t dominate because as soon as you dominate... then why is there a Youth Pastor?” (SD)
- “I would expect them to give me guidance without micromanaging me” (SD)
- “I do expect leadership, but the kind of leadership that we see in Jesus where he leads the disciples but he gives them ownership” (LD)
- “I think micromanaging is a major frustration for people who are competent. If you are competent there is nothing more frustrating for you than being micromanaged” (LD)
- “When responsibility is delegated to really delegate that... kind of just letting people run with the things that you’ve entrusted people to run with” (LD)
- “I would then I would rather not run things by him I would rather just do things because that was the way to get things done. I would rather apologise later” (SD)

**Acknowledge Own Faults**

The fourth most commonly given expectation, cited by four out of ten participants, was that a minister be willing to acknowledge their own faults and limitations. One participant (SA) tells the following positive story to highlight how meaningful it can be and how genuine his relationship with his minister became when his minister acknowledged his own struggles in saying to his Youth Pastor – “I’ve lived for more than 20 years in a world that said black people were inferior and white people were superior. Were I to say that white people my age have fully recovered from the mental indoctrination then, you know, I would be lying. It’s going to be a journey and we need to be intentional about it.”

Another participant (SA) describes it like this – “I think that until the church in general kind of gets over themselves and the senior leadership get over the fact that they know it all, and allow young people to express themselves within their own context... I do believe churches
will then see thriving ministries.” Another participant (SD) states that he expects a minister to have integrity and “if they do have struggles be honest about that.”

Visibility and Involvement in Youth Ministry
The next most common expectations were visibility and accountability. One participant (SA) described the simple gesture of his minister attending a youth camp and participating in a dance called “Money”, a gesture which sent a message of support to the young people. Another participant (LA) explained that visibility of the minister in youth ministry helped the congregation members to realise that “it is not two separate churches but one church.”

Accountability for Youth Pastor
With regard to accountability, one participant (SD) stated a desire that the minister would “know say what was needed to be said if I was deviating off track.” One frustration raised about the minister with whom the participant (SA) was otherwise satisfied, was that the minister tended to avoid conflict and therefore did not address it or hold other staff members accountable when their actions were impacting on the rest of the staff and on others.

viii. Personal and Spiritual Support
How would you describe your relationship with the supervising minister in terms of the personal and spiritual support you received?

Table 11: Personal and Spiritual Support

When asking the participants to describe the level of personal and spiritual support they received, it became clear that their experience changed as one minister succeeded another. Participants would state, for example, that they had no personal or spiritual support initially
but that this situation improved when a new minister arrived – or vice versa. For this reason, the same participant may have indicated that the “received strong support” and that they “received no support”, referring to different phases of their ministry under the leadership of different ministers.

**Personal Support**

Six of the ten participants had experienced strong personal support during at least one stage of their appointment. A further three of the ten participants had experienced limited support during their ministry. The participants who indicated that they did have at least some personal support from the ministers or from others in the church passed the following comments:

- “We are on good terms - he is relevant, he is supportive, we have status updates” (LA)
- “On a personal basis there is support, he does talk about personal issues… It wasn’t only the Youth Pastor and the minister relationship… it even got to a point where he was interested in… “where do you stay? Are you okay?” (SA)
- “He understands that I am in the process of paying lobola, which is very strenuous financially, and the church has offered support” (SA)
- “But I would say that I’ve had the support of all the church leaders. I haven’t had any struggle or permutation whatsoever” (SD)

**Spiritual Support**

On the other hand, there were fewer participants who felt that they had received spiritual support. Only four participants had felt that they had received strong spiritual support over the course of their ministry. One participant received some spiritual support. Five participants felt that they had received no spiritual support whatsoever from their ministers. Those who did receive spiritual support offered the following comments:

- “Personal and spiritual support - 100% happy with that” (SA)
- Spiritually he is a good leader. He’s strong in teachings, encouraging us to read, of course! He really wants to see those he leads grow.” (LA)

One participant (SD) felt that he had experienced no personal or spiritual support at any stage in his ministry, saying – “we weren’t on a level of connecting - personal or spiritual.”
One participant (LD) described a sense of being supported in the task of youth ministry but neither on a personal or spiritual level. The participant said – “I felt like I wasn’t supported as an individual. I might have been supported as a pastor but certainly not as an individual. There were never really any conversations around my dreams and my goals.” The same participant also went to describe the spiritual support received saying – “certainly not from a spiritual perspective was kind of, a little bit... it was absent and noticeably so.”

**Inconsistent or Conditional Support**

Some of the participants described the support as inconsistent or conditional. For example, one participant (SD) said that “I had personal support when I wasn’t going against his will or when other people in the church weren’t making comments about how great I was without reciprocating for him.” Another participant shared “I think really the support has been overwhelming but obviously I come to know - I’ve been dealing with myself as well as everyone – that support can only go as far as our interests go. When it comes to issues in which we have been part of perpetrators, you know, speaking about different issues of justice – then the support kind of stops.” Another participant (LA) describes inconsistency in the support received from the church executive committee – “Because the executive was divided a lot, you never knew which way they would go, so one minute they’d be for youth ministry the one minute they wouldn’t be.”

**Poor Support**

The following are responses from participants who experienced poor or non-existent support personally and spiritually:

- “They care from a distance... in terms of spiritual and personal growth it’s really non-existent” (SA)
- “When it comes to ministerial direction and support, I think that’s probably been my biggest struggle. I have never got it here. I got it elsewhere” Long Tenure Active
- “The support... let me break it down... So if I had to look at ministers, very little” (LA)
- “My first funeral was the father of one of my kids. It broke my heart. I had nobody to speak to within this environment. I had no support within this environment for the first funeral that I did” (LA)
- “The spiritual leadership side, I wouldn’t say at all” (LA)
- “On a spiritual basis out of ten, I would say two” (SA)
“I wouldn’t say I received much of anything. I had to go outside to look for it - a mentor outside of the church, even then was not probably giving me sufficient to actually want to move forward in ministry” (SD)

ix. In-Service Training

How would you describe your in-service training you received?

Table 12: In-Service Training

One participant expressed that they had received excellent in-service training. Nine out of ten participants said that they had received little to no in-service training. One participant described a recent shift whereby a new minister to the church had begun to ensure that training happens, but even with this participant there had been no training for the majority of the tenure in that position. Another participant (LD) described one minister during his tenure who “wanted to develop young leaders and he sent us on GLS and other courses.” The following were some statements with regard to the matter of limited or non-existent training:

- “There’s been very little in-house training” (SA)
- “I haven’t had anything, so out of ten it would be zero” (SA)
- “I was left alone with the kids just to do what I do” (LA)
- “That doesn’t really happen here... I’ve never had any training here... it’s kind of a sink or swim kind of environment, that’s how I got it, so either you figure it out and you get on with it and you just do it because it’s what you’ve got to do, or you fail dismally and you leave” (SA)
- “I think my first three months were very much “deer in the headlights” because I had no... I won’t say I had no direction... but the ministers were not - “Okay so this is
what a Youth Pastor does, this is what the expectation is. We realize you’ve never taught a child in your life, so let’s help you.” There was none of that.” (LA)

- “I think in-service training was kind of a bit of a myth I suppose. It was a lot of kind of trial and error...so a lot of the in-service training was really just about me trying to figure out what was going on. I don’t think there was such a thing” (LD)
- “I can’t remember any experience where he sat down with me and said “Hey, I just want to teach you something” (LD)

While some of the participants had engaged in theoretical or practical training outside of the local context but this was not followed up with in-service training. One participant (Active Longer) who did complete a training course prior to entering youth ministry but had not received any training thereafter stated that he had “been running on reserve since then.” Conducting a funeral was one area where several participants indicated some level of training. One participant (LA) explained her first day on the job – “My first day here I sat in that office there, and the minister said to me “So this is how you do a funeral.” Another participant (LD) said – “I can summarize what he taught me about ministry in like two things. He taught me how to do a funeral and he taught me how to do weddings. That’s it.” There was a sense that some participants were able to learn from their ministers outside of formal training. One participant (LD) described several valuable lessons he learnt from his minister – how to select staff, how to spend money wisely and how to bring diversity to worship.

x. Appropriate Feedback
How would you describe the level of feedback you received?

Table 13: Appropriateness of Feedback Received
Appropriate, Constructive Feedback

There were two participants who felt that the feedback that received was appropriate and constructive, both in the category of Active. One participant (SA) explained “they’ve been able to - without discouraging me - show me if I perhaps could do things another way. And that’s been very helpful. It might leave a sour taste in my mouth at the moment but in the long run, very helpful.”

Only Negative Feedback

Four of the five participants stated that they only ever received negative feedback. The following comments were offered in this regard:

- “Feedback - Pathetic. Unless there was trouble, unless there was something that they wanted to moan about... then there was feedback” (LA)
- “It was really rare to get, as you say, appropriate feedback. There was great negative toward what I was doing but nothing positive or any sort of motivation” (SD)
- “Feedback... zero being nothing and ten being excellent, I would say two, that low” (LD)

One participant (LD) explained that where there was feedback it was always negative and that the minister would often pass negative comments in a subtle way rather than openly addressing his concerns. Another participant (LD) explained: “I got feedback... they were always very good at telling me when things didn’t work... I think if you’re serious about ministry you know when something didn’t work. You don’t need to be told. You can watch something and you know – “We’re not going to do that again.” If you’re critical of yourself as I am you don’t need anybody else to give you that negative feedback but I think that because of that, that was their approach as well.” The same participant describes how their farewell tea brought the opportunity for the supervising ministry to offer much positive feedback. Their response was - “Maybe if you said these things to me six months ago I might still be here... You get an idea of what they think and how they feel about the impact that you’ve had, but I’ve already got both feet out the door. Like, it’s a little bit late in terms of trying to encourage me now, when I’ve left.” Another participant (SD) explained that there was no performance process, but that they knew they were doing well because of what people in the congregation were saying to them.
xi. Support and Freedom for Projects

How would you describe the level of freedom and support given to your ideas?

Table 14: Support and Freedom for Projects

Participants were asked to describe the level of support they received with regard to their ideas. Responses varied from “average” to “awesome.” There were a variety of responses in each group and participants referred to the support (or lack thereof) that they received from the minister, church executive and congregation members.

Sufficient Freedom

Some of the participants described the positive experience of having freedom allocated in the task of youth ministry. One participant (LD) said “they gave me a lot of freedom to try things and do thing that were probably unconventional.” The participant also shared that “they trusted me remarkable and let kind of my ideas and the things that I had, they gave me a lot of freedom to run with things and a lot of support to try things and do things a little differently which was great.” The same participant also described the minister team as “entrepreneurial” explaining that – “I never heard them use the words – “But we’ve done it like this before” or “That’s how we’ve always done it” which I think is great because they weren’t afraid to try things or change things up, so I think that was really good of them to allow me to do that.” Another participant (SD) describing the executive body as supporting ideas said “it wasn’t a sense of “we think things should be done this way” - we never had
that.” A participant (LD) said of one of his ministers that they “allowed you to own your ministry and to speak up for it.”

Reasonable Limits
Some participants had been prevented from implementing certain ideas, but felt that this had been done in fairness. One participant (SA) said that “anything that has been turned down has been on a reasonable note, but not much has been turned down it’s either been further development or suspended.” Similarly, another participant (SD) said “rules that was applied by him was done fairly in fairness and very open to me as well.” One participant (SA) described the following – “I don’t feel like my ideas are shut down. They might take a while to implement, but generally I feel that they are allowed to happen” he did say, however, that one of the ministers was quite controlling and “ideas can just be stifled and controlled.”

Poor Level of Support
There were participants who felt that their ideas and projects were not supported. One participant (Late Tenure Departed) was asked to make changes to one of the youth programmes. His response was to ask the question “Why change something that works?”

Another participant (SD) described the limited freedom given to him saying – “I would say that we were allowed to cast our own rod; however, we weren’t allowed to fish.”

Two participants described instances where the congregation members or parents had criticised the content of their teaching. For one participant (LA) the incident happened when they had tried to help young people reflect on their home life and were asked … “are you trying to interrogate our kids?” For another participant (SA), there was criticism when they addressed the topic of sexuality and day to day matters and were told that they should not teach anything outside of Bible verses. In contrast to the participants whose new ideas were met with freedom, others were told – “people always want to say to you this has been done this way and it should be this way.”
xii. Minister’s Insight into Youth Ministry

How would you describe your relationship with the senior minister with regard to his or her insight into youth ministry?

*Figure 13: Minister’s Insight into Youth Ministry*

The participants were asked to describe their relationship with their senior minister with regard to their perception of their minister’s insight into youth ministry.

**Ministers’ Lack of Insight into Youth Ministry**

Six participants perceived that their ministers had little or no insight into youth ministry. One participant explained that “I didn’t feel any input he gave me about youth work was any use and was more a thing of – “this was what we did at my old church and you should do it” and it was the kind of stuff that I had enough knowledge and experience to know wasn’t going to work.” Another participant (SD) explained that his minister was not necessarily old fashioned, but lacked innovation in dealing with youth. Not all of these participants presented this perceived lack of insight as a major source of frustration. For example, one participant (SA) explains the following – “there isn’t much knowledge as far as Youth Ministry is concerned and the direction of Youth Ministry today, but the kind of person he is and the fact that he’s been open to, you know, to be led by the Youth Pastor if I can say so, that has kind of made up for that.” Similarly, another participant (SD) explained this – “I don’t think it was his area of expertise – and he made that quite clear actually coming to the church that he doesn’t want to be involved with youth work. So it was the understanding that he’d stay out of my way most of the time.” A participant (LA) described their relationships with two different
ministers one of whom did have insight and the other did not. The participant stated that that “the minister that I did get on with had very little insight into youth.” The lack of insight did not affect the quality of the relationship.

Ministers’ Lack of Insight into Youth Ministry as a Bad Experience
The lack of insight of ministers was experienced by other participants in a very negative way. One participant (LD) described a period of time in which an 89-year-old retired minister was sent to their church – “who didn’t understand youth ministry or support it much. I can just remember one thing he told me – ‘If you play drums ever in church I’ll fire you’... and luckily that wasn’t allowed so I’m very grateful for that.” Referring to youth ministry, another participant (SA) said “everyone says just because a minister has got a collar he understands everything in the life of the church, and it’s not the fact.” One participant (SA) criticised the system by saying – “the fact that ministers do not get given a hint of training from seminary as far as youth ministry should be done is still a huge one.”

Ministers with Insight into Youth Ministry
Two in particular articulated and described their ministers as being insightful about young people. One of these participants (SD) said – “his insight it was really quite good. There’s no doubt about the fact that he really understood young people and he would really connect with them. I and there could be the things and he would really journey with young people and really grow them in every way possible that needed to be done.” In spite of this, the participant who shared this story described a particularly difficult relationship with the senior pastor. The one participant (LD) who did express appreciation for their minister’s insight into youth ministry was in reference to the fact that the minister was a parent to children in the youth and therefore able to help the Youth Pastor to understand what is helpful to communicate to the parents of the children.

Church Leadership’s Lack of Insight into Youth Ministry
Several participants described the level that the church leadership as a whole demonstrated insight and investment into youth ministry. One participant (LA) said – “my understanding is very different to the church.” This participant gave an example of how the leadership did not seem to understand what is at stake in youth ministry - “For them the biggest thing is there’s a dented ceiling fan and I’m worried about the kid that’s cutting and the kid that is committing suicide.” The same participant describes the guidance offered by the executive in the following way – “it was always just a case of “do this, fix that, go there.” Like an instructive
type of environment without any insight into what it was I did.” This participant offered another practical example whereby the participant’s perspective it was critical to allow the children to play with a ball in the church hall so that they would relax and begin to socialise, but the executive committee would not allow it. The participant shared frustration at “their lack of insight into what it is to be a child and why they behave the way they do.” The same participant also complained that they were expected to be at the office at all times, saying – “ministry doesn’t happen in my office, the understanding is just not there.”

Another participant described a scenario whereby the whole congregation was given slips of paper and asked to write down their vision for the local church. According to the participant, “no one in the church wrote anything about youth ministry or young adults’ ministry.” One participant (SA) criticised the church for a lack of insight and a lack of prioritising youth ministry. The participant stated – “it is almost like the church doesn’t understand what this generation wants from the church.” The same participant also said – “every church wants a pumping Youth Ministry but not many churches are willing to do what it takes to have one.”

The participant described this generation of young people as passionate, but said that “churches are not willing to do what it takes to equip them, to enable them to become on-fire disciples for Christ within their churches.” One participant became frustrated with the way in which adults in the church viewed young people. He said – “they had this idea that the young people are really, really daft and they just know nothing, and funny enough they actually are clued up more than some of the adults and in the church.” Another participant (SD) says “when I look at youth currently, I still hurt because I believe that there’s so much more that can be done and the church is not investing enough when it comes to youth and it saddens me.” Another participant (LA) said that – “because we have discovered that we lose a lot of young people as a result of what we use Methodist methodology.” One participant (LD) described that what their supervisors “didn’t get” was that at times when it did not look like they were doing any work, they were really busy with the work of building relationships. One participant expressed a frustration that the broader church was not fully utilising Youth Pastors – “The church needs Youth Pastors and the other challenge that we have as Youth Pastors, Youth Pastors that are currently in the church that I’ve interacted with are gifted, they have got capacity in many things, but the broader church is not using them.”

**Improvement Over Time**

While several participants expressed negative feelings about the church’s insight into youth ministry, three participants explained that there was an improvement over time in how the
church accepted, embraced or understood youth ministry. One participant (LA) says – “it’s completely different from where we started.” He goes on to say that “only now the church is responding positively and it actually speaks into issues of mentorship, of issues of programmes and how can they be part of them.” He does not imply that this happened quickly, explaining that “Only now three years back did they then understand somehow the concept and what it aims to do.” Another participant (SD) said – “there was probably more resistance to it when I arrived versus by the time I left when I’d become the new normal so that was nice to know that I’d been able to make a bit of an impact as well.”

xiii. Conflict with the Minister

How would you describe your relationship with the minister in terms of conflict?

*Figure 16: Conflict with the Minister*

![Conflict with the Minister](image)

### Poor Handling of Conflict

Four of the participants described the ministers as handling conflict poorly – either with regard to their relationship with the Youth Pastor (participant) or with others. One participant (LA) describes a power struggle and conflict between the two ministers in one such as so severe that it became physically violent. Another participant (LD) described a conflict with the minister and a colleague – fellow Youth Pastor – where the two individuals “didn’t jell and he fired her.” One participant (SD) does not give details but describes his minister’s response to conflict as follows – “his way of addressing issues wasn’t really sort of addressed in a good sense of behaviour.” Another participant (SA) is generally happy with the way that
conflict is managed but did raise one incident where the minister chose to discuss an issue with others rather than face-to-face directly with the participant. One participant (SD) described a certain degree of conflict stating that “you can’t keep two bulls in one kraal.” This participant acknowledged that this may be an exaggeration and that while both he and the minister had strong personalities, their relationship was good on the whole.

xiv. Appreciated Aspects of Minister’s Leadership Style?
What aspects of the senior minister’s leadership style did you most enjoy and why?

*Figure 17: Appreciated Aspects of Minister’s Leadership Style*

The participants described several positive dynamics in their relationship with their supervising minister when asked the question “What aspects of your senior minister’s leadership style did you most enjoy and why?” The most common answers, with similar answers grouped together, were (1) room to disagree (2) minister had good insight into youth ministry (3) listening and pastoral care and (4) the minister conveyed a clear vision.

**Conflict Dealt with in a Positive Manner**
Four participants described their ministers as dealing well with conflict and a further three explained that they had room to disagree with their minister. One participant (SA) shared that “when there is conflict its generally dealt with in a professional manner and I don’t feel that grudges are held and that sort of stuff, so generally its quite good.” Another participant stated that while they had seen their senior minister lose his temper, they felt that “if there was something I was really struggling with he’d have heard me and I think I could go and
Another participant did not describe the senior minister relating to himself with regard to conflict, but relayed an incident of how the minister handled a situation in a way that protected the participant from conflict with others in the church, which was appreciated. In describing the room to disagree, one participant (LA) said – “Sometimes we don’t agree, but we agree on a way forward” and further describes that those conflicts brought them closer together. Another participant (LD) shares that “really on the frontline together you will have arguments and you will disagree and I always felt like I was allowed to disagree.”

**Proactive with Pastoral Care and Concern**

A positive dynamic described by four Youth Pastors was that of a senior minister who listened to them and offered pastoral care to them. One participant (LD) described a minister who would ask important questions - “How are you doing? How is ministry? How are you?” Another participant (SA) similarly describes the questions that make him feel cared for - “Are you fine? Is everything okay? How is your Youth Ministry?”

**Conveying a Clear Vision**

Three of the participants described their minister as a visionary leader or explained that the vision was clear. One participant (SD) described this dynamic saying “we were allowed to cast our own vision and that was in line with the church’s vision and we were steering onto that at all times and that was supported.” Another participant (LA) shared “he shares his vision with me, of the church, so we strive towards one vision.”

**xv. Incompatible Aspects of Minister’s Leadership Style**

What aspects of the senior minister’s leadership style did you struggle to accept and why?

*Figure 18: Incompatible Aspects of Minister’s Leadership Style*
Participants were asked to describe which aspects of their senior minister’s leadership style they most struggled to accept. The most common answers, with similar answers grouped together, were (1) the minister was autocratic or controlling (2) the minister handled conflict poorly (3) serious theological differences with the minister and (4) the minister was insecure and easily threatened.

Autocratic and Controlling
Seven of the ten participants described their minister as autocratic or controlling. One participant (SA) described frustration as authority would be delegated and then taken away. Another participant (SA) said – “it gets frustrating because we haven’t implemented it but we can’t because all the authority sits up there.”

Another described their senior minister as sometimes being “incredibly controlling which can stifle creativity, stifle new... your desire to do things diligently.” Another long-serving participant (LA) described it in this way – “he wanted me to do certain things a certain way but it wasn’t something that I could align myself with, it was just assuming that his beliefs would be mine and his direction would be fine and I don’t believe you can do that with somebody.” One of the ministers was described by a participant (LA) as “he’ll be autocratic, he’ll be dominant, it was his way or the highway. I usually don’t choose the highway, because it would cause more conflicts.” Another participant (SD) described his minister as dominant and expressed frustration at times with regard to “voiding and nullifying decisions.” Two participants (LD and SD) described the relationship with their senior minister as a relationship with a “boss” rather than a pastor or captain.

xvi. External Expectations Placed on the Youth Pastor
How would you describe the expectations that were placed on you as a Youth Pastor?

Figure 19: Expectations placed on the Youth Pastor
Participants were asked to describe the external expectations they faced as Youth Pastors. The three participants in the category Short Tenure Departed did not answer with specific expectations. The following were the most common answers, with similar answers grouped together: (1) numerical growth (2) run vibrant programmes (3) facilitating a faith journey (4) interpreting the mission of the church for the youth.

Numerical Growth
Three participants mentioned numerical growth or the expectation that their ministries would draw in lots of youth as an expectation. Three participants – not all of them the same – described their success in growing the youth numerically for example from 2 children to 450 children or from 79 young people to 420 young people.

Programme-Centred Expectations
Two participants mentioned programme-centred expectations. One participant (SA) described the expectation to “build a pumping youth, which is relevant, engaging.” Another participant (SA) described it as follows - “People are expecting this Youth Pastor messiah, you know. And I even said to him, you know, should I want to fulfil that expectation it’s pretty easy, you just get programme after programme after programme. Make the church look busy and everyone will be happy. But perhaps at times I would not want to go out looking for affirmation and stuff. So I would rather have a horrible four years, and on the fifth year when I leave have people realise what has actually happened to the youth ministry.”

Expectations by Youth
Two participants spoke about the expectations placed on them by the youth themselves. One participant (LA) said “from young people the expectation is for a compassionate, loving, person who is there for them always to listen, to advice, to teach and to walk them through… that’s the expectation.”

Unclear or Inconsistent Expectations
Aside from describing the content of the expectations, at least five of the ten participants felt that the expectations were unclear, inconsistent or not properly outlined. These participants came from all four categories as active and departed, shorter and longer. The following are some of the comments with regard to this dynamic:
Sometimes that’s the goal post but then the goal post shifts. So often it was the fact that you don’t really know what you’re supposed to be doing that’s the expectation. So I understand it now it’s this and then it’s that and then…” (SA)

“It depended on how the leadership was going what the expectation was” (LA)

“The expectations were not properly outlined, so you’ll find mostly they are expecting what you are not actually supposed to do” (LA)

“The expectations were all very unspoken” (SD)

“She wasn’t always clear around what her expectations were” (LD)

Lack of Expectations as a Positive Experience

For at least two of the participants, a lack of expectations was experienced as a positive dynamic. One participant (LA) wrote that because “there wasn’t really a functioning youth ministry, that I could make it how I was led to make it, I didn’t have to fall into something that was here.” For one participant (SA) who came from a different cultural background, people did not seem to expect that he would reproduce the typical youth ministry programmes one would expect. He described the experience as follows – “an opportunity to explore youth ministry, without any expectations because expectations have been lost after people have realised they’re going to be disappointed if they have an expectation that I cannot live up to unfortunately.” This same participant also shared in his interview how he had initially been determined to prove himself in everything that he did in youth ministry. Another participant (SD) also described an experience whereby he did not feel that there were any specific expectations. This participant felt that the church did not really know what a Youth Pastor should do so expectations were limited to some of what had been done by previous Youth Pastors. He said “The expectations developed as I put things in place and the expectations that it would continue from year to year.” This participant did, however, share some sense of expectation in that people held him in high regard on his arrival. He described it as follows – “I arrived already with a reputation of sorts. People thought I was bringing something - and I started preaching not long after I arrived so people had that view of me as a leader so for the most part it was very easy to influence people because there wasn’t this sense of having to prove that I was capable of doing this.”

Self-Imposed Expectations

There was another participant (LD) who also felt that the expectations on them were self-imposed rather than imposed from the outside. The participant shared – “I have very high
expectations of myself and what I do and I think all they did was see the expectations I had and join me in those, so the expectations were high, but they weren’t expectations that I didn’t have of myself”

Unreasonably High Expectations
In contrast, several of the participants did feel that the expectations that were placed on them were too high. One participant (SA) described the expectations as “unreasonable” and qualified the statement by describing a typical week with a wide range of demanding and time-consuming responsibilities. Another (SD) described his situation saying that “a lot was expected of me and as I said for me to try and achieve something was really difficult.” One participant (SA) described some of the expectations that were unreasonable in the following terms – “you’ve got to have results in two weeks’ type of thing ... whereas often Youth Ministry takes five years to mature or two to three years to mature sometimes they want it done in like 6 weeks they want to see 100 people here in 6 weeks. And you’re like whoa that’s impossible!” One participant (Active Shorter) describes some of his struggle to reconcile his own role with the expectations of others. He explains that he initially made the mistake of “committing to too many things” but that he rectified that mistake by “down scaling, and trying to convey my role to the church better.”

Expectations by Ministers who were Formerly Youth Pastors
There were several participants who served under ministers who were former Youth Pastors. None of the participants whose ministers had served as Youth Pastors described a sense of empathy or understanding with the demands of the youth ministry. Several described unreasonable expectations as relating to the minister’s own former approach to youth ministry. One participant (SA) said the following – “having a minister that’s been a Youth Pastor but a Youth Pastor when youth ministry was understood differently, when it was more about a Youth Pastor being someone appointed from amongst the youth... and also having a minister who was a Youth Pastor at a time when there weren’t so many options for teens, you know. And they constantly tell you about how they used to fill up a hall with 600 kids or whatever it might be, and they tacitly say, or there is this unexpressed concern that there are not 600 kids. Even though the five churches next door do not have 600 kids but they have this concern – why don’t we have 500 kids?”
Describing their two ministers, another participant (LA) said “the other minister had been a Youth Pastor and I had even less support... I found he was wanting more a prodigy than somebody who would grow into ministry.”

Another participant (SD) said “he had ideas from when he was a Youth Pastor thirty years ago or something. So, and the church obviously has changed a lot since then especially with effect to youth work, um, so I had to I had to take what he said with a pinch of salt most of the time.”

xvii. Support in Meeting Expectations
To what extent were you supported in meeting the expectations placed on you?

Table 20: Support in Meeting Expectations

Participants were asked to describe the support they received in meeting the expectations placed on them.

Poor or Inconsistent Support
Several described support which was poor, inconsistent or ambiguous:

- “In hindsight I always wondered if it was support or “I’ll do it, because I’ll do it right, and once I’ve trained you, you must just do it this way you know”” (LD)
- “In meeting the church’s expectations there was great support. In meeting the greater youths’ expectations there was very much minimal support.” (SD)
- “Youth Pastors are just not supported if they don’t meet and motivate one another, they are really not motivated and whenever church going through difficulties the first
part of the ministry that gets to feel the pain is Youth Ministry some of the Youth Pastors are not Youth Pastors anymore because of lack of support. Some are even considering leaving ministry or leaving churches because there are just inconsistencies” (SA)

- “I’ve seen multiple Youth Pastors come in and out of the doors here because of this very fact. So they come in, they’re not really guided or helped or given the tools to succeed” (SA)

Adequate Support in Terms of Resources
The participants were not specifically asked about the financial or material resources allocated to their ministries, but several of them did volunteer some information and insight about the allocation of resources. Two participants described a very positive attitude of the executive toward allocation of funds to youth. One participant (SD) explained – “I never really got much pushback even if I was asking for funding. I typically asked for more funds every year than had ever been asked before and it wasn’t really very seldom was it questioned because I was able to explain what we wanted to do and why.” Another participant (LD) described the executive in their church as follows – “they gave me a lot of support and backing, and if I said I wanted to take someone on a camp they would back it and they would pay for it.”

Disproportionate Support in Terms of Resources
Some participants felt that the resources allocated to young people or children was disproportionately small in comparison to what is allocated for adults. One participant (Active Shorter) described it as follows – “the leadership of the church will always allocate a big chunk of budget and resources to other ministries in the church and then you look at Youth Ministry and church ministry always, it’s just the below the 10% and that is where in most cases we differ.” This participant described a scenario where the youth were moved from a suitable venue to an unsuitable venue with the promise of renovations, but that these had not been carried through, resulting in the youth feeling neglected. One participant (LD) offered an analogy – “young people will always feel like they’re standing at the bottom waiting to catch what the adults drop and I don’t think that’s ever going to change.” This participant also explained – “the expectations were at a very high level, and the resources were kind of down here and you had to find a way to creatively bridge the gap without much support.” Another participant (LA) described a “discrepancy between the
verbal support offered and the resources provided – “the support is just, you know verbal support, when I go to the senior manager’s office, the senior minister - just deep down to say things are going well, the youth is going well – there is just an ear to listen. But in terms of being there or also getting in terms of resources that one is just too slow.” Another participant (LA) said that “the one minute you’d have this budget and the next minute you wouldn’t have.”

Remuneration Support
Several participants raised the matter of remuneration in the interview. For one participant (LD) the matter was raised in the context of going to an interview but not being offered the position because the church had not budgeted enough to pay a married Youth Pastor. One may assume that this participant was clear in this interview was the expected remuneration might be. Another participant (SA) had a contrasting experience. He accepted a position with an unrealistically low remuneration and explains the situation as follows – “As far as stipend was concerned, because for me it was very tricky because it was not only my first time as a Youth Pastor in an office it was literally my first job. So I didn’t know what a working person might actually need to sustain themselves, no one told me about that ... it’s never a stipend for someone who’s going to start a family.” One participant (LA) stated that the church was not paying him at all in spite of eight years of service. Another participant (LA) had actually been retrenched several months prior to the interview but continued serving as the Youth Pastor in spite of the retrenchment through the sponsorship of some families and by working part time outside of the church.

One participant (LA) described the inconsistency of the remuneration of Youth Pastors between different churches and locations, saying – “when I started there was a Youth Pastor who was working 4 years longer than I had, she’s no longer a Youth Pastor and she’d earned R2000 for the last three years and she got no allowances. I got one allowance ... then there’s Youth Pastors in (other areas) who get eight allowances, and I’m like where’s the justice? Where’s the fairness?” Another participant (SD) described the injustice of the discrepancy between what a Youth Pastor is paid and what a minister is paid saying – “my minister was earning four times what I was earning, had less needs and was doing a tenth of the work... that’s just not a sustainable model that doesn’t make sense.”
xviii. Differing Understanding of Youth Ministry
How did you differ with the leadership in your understanding of youth ministry?

*Figure 19: Different Understanding of Youth Ministry*

![Bar Chart](chart.png)

**XIX. Reason for Remaining**
What factors have helped you to remain in your position?

*Figure 22: Reason for Remaining*

![Bar Chart](chart.png)
All of the actively serving participants were asked to explain the factors that contribute to their remaining in their position. In addition, some of those participants who have departed but did so after serving a longer than average tenure were asked what factors contributed to their staying as long as they did. The most common answers, with similar answers grouped together, were (1) the calling of God (2) love for the youth (3) enjoying the ministry (4) making a difference in people’s lives and (5) a sense of responsibility to finish what they have started or to fulfil the vision they received.

The following are comments made by various participants in answer to this question:

“Definitely the love, the passion... I think being driven by seeing an impact as one does in one’s space, despite all challenges that I’ve encountered those are always calling me back to youth ministry” (LA).

“I believed in what I was doing, I knew that God had called me to serve and to be a part of something that was happening that was bigger than myself. And so I believed in that, I believed in the vision that God had given me for this ministry. And I knew God had given me a picture of what I wanted it to look like and so I stayed until that picture became a reality.” (LD)

“Well firstly God... that would be a given... I’ve tried to leave on many occasions but it’s been a clear no every time. I think what kept me here is probably the kids, but still it’s not been anything that I’ve regretted, I would do this again in a heartbeat, I’m actually sorry I didn’t do it earlier... “Politics, so church attitude and church structures, and attitude and politics with the ministers and with executive and the underlying stuff that the church doesn’t get to see... that was probably my reason for wanting to leave. My ministry itself? Never. Never ever, ever! This is where I wanted to be.” (LA)

“I would say at times one feels like either leaving the position or leaving the institution because you get overwhelmed to an extent that the joy that you had when you experience the call is no longer there because you feel this is too much. Then at times, I look back to upon when I left my job, everyone was against it but God... I was convinced this was God speaking and God confirmed it in many ways and I am here.” (SA)

“I don’t have plans to leave this position, and that’s not because I don’t see... because my mind is telling me to stay, it’s because I genuinely believe that I’m called to this place for this
season and so as difficult as it has been and as difficult as it is going to be, I’m willing to face this storm because I’m convinced that this is where God has called me... the only reason I’m still involved in ministry now and I’ll be completely honest is because I love it. I love working with people, and I love what I get to do. I love seeing God working in people’s lives, it makes everything worth it. I can face these trials and tribulations week in and week out, when I get to see the fruits of my labour, but even more than that is the fact that I am personally convicted that this is where God as placed me and what God wants to do” (SA)

... I remember when I first spoke to my Youth Pastor way back in the day, well it wasn’t that long ago - a couple of years ago - and I spoke to him about the fact that I might be interested in going into ministry and his words to me were “well that’s great and stuff but you need to come back to me with verses that confirm your calling” and that was the most phenomenal advice he gave to me. I always give people that advice because I often go back to those verses when times are really tough and I’m like I can’t do this anymore... this is absolutely ridiculous this whole thing is, is frustrating... I often go back there and I’m reminded that God reminds me through those verses that he has called me, ordained me and placed me for such a time as this, and so that would be why I stay. I often go back there and I’m reminded that God reminds me through those verses that he has called me, ordained me and placed me for such a time as this, and so that would be why I stay” (SA)
Chapter 5: Theory of Action

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Having listened to in-context concrete situations as well as surveying the theoretical material that is available, the theory-praxis loop now calls us to ask the question “How Should We Respond?” As stated by Heitink (1999: 113) the current praxis is unsatisfactory and “something must be done!” The object of Practical Theology is action (Heitink 1999: 147) and this action is, specifically, the mediation of the Christian faith (Heitink 1999: 168). Zerfass (1974: 167 cf Heitink 1999: 113) proposed a hermeneutical model based on the following process: “Praxis must first be examined with the use of a series of instruments from the social sciences. As a result, tensions become visible, leading to the emergence of impulses to act, with a view to renewal and improvement of the existing praxis.”

5.1.1. The Relationship Between Theory and Praxis

In engaging the empirical analysis, this section seeks to describe the insights provided by the descriptive, hermeneutical and empirical task in order to undertake the strategic task. In light of the theoretical and empirical findings, the original praxis “problem statement” is revisited:

Negative interpersonal relationships between Youth Pastors and church leadership often result in an end to their tenure in the church, causing disruption in the local church’s capacity to develop healthy, sustainable youth ministries thus preventing the church from fulfilling its theological mandate to spiritually nurture and guide young people as an integral part of the faith community.

5.1.2. The Effect of Interpersonal Dynamics on Tenure

The theoretical and empirical research suggests that negative interpersonal relationships significantly affects the Youth Pastor in her role. This is especially true of the relationship with the senior minister. However, the empirical findings suggest that this does not necessarily lead to their departure. A comment from Vossen (1987: 246 cf Heitink 1999: 131) rings true – “Human action cannot simply be reduced to behaviour that is determined by external factors, since it intends to realise certain goals that are related in an inter-subjective way.”
5.1.3. Communication and Systems Theory

Communicative Action Theory provides insight in the formation of the theory of action. In communicative action the strategy is to change the praxis in such a way as to more closely represent Kingdom reality — “love, freedom, solidarity and justice” (Heitink 1999: 156).

Drawing from the insights of Communication Action Theory, it is noted that — “Organisms and organisations are in a homeostatic equilibrium. This means that adding more information usually causes a disturbance of the equilibrium. If one is to avoid protest, enough safety valves have to be provided before additional information can be allowed” (Heitink 1999: 214). Systems theory is linked to communication theory as systems — defined as “an arrangement of components into a distinct, typical whole” (Keuning 1973: 46 cf Heitink 1999: 217) — complement communicative strategies. Systems theory recognises that phenomena do not exist in isolation but in an interconnected, coherent whole. In the praxis of youth ministry, the experience of the Youth Pastor is interconnected to a variety of components including his or her family upbringing, denominational system, local church identity, cultural context and network of relationships.

5.1.4. Answering the Question

The research question was:

What are the factors contributing to negative interpersonal relationships between Youth Pastors and the other members of church leadership teams?

The qualitative empirical research did not offer conclusive statistical data and there is still much to clarify and understand. However, the outcomes of the interviews suggested that the following factors played a role in contributing to negative interpersonal dynamics on church leadership teams:

- Youth Pastors’ (unfulfilled) expectation for personal and spiritual support from minister
- Feelings of inadequacy or doubting the impact of the ministry
- Church leadership not taking the Youth Pastor or youth ministry seriously
5.1.5. Aim of the Research
The aim of the research was:

To present to the MCSA a theory of action based on practical-theological research, aimed at addressing the phenomena of negative interpersonal relationships that impact on the tenure of a Youth Pastor.

The theoretical and empirical research confirmed the undesirability of the current situation. Participants described a decline in youth ministry and loss of relationships at the event of their departure, using emotional language to describe the disruption of relationships among the young people. In this case, the desired praxis is a reduction in the cases where youth ministry in local churches is disrupted by the departure of Youth Pastors under negative circumstances.

5.2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This section will outline key insights about the current praxis based on both the theoretical and the empirical research.

5.2.1. The Impact of Tenure Disruption
I observed a sense of “falling apart” at the end of a tenure not only for the Youth Pastor but for the minister as well. When the minister departed, the Youth Pastor was significantly impacted, having relied primarily on the minister for support. When the Youth Pastor departed, the youth ministry was significantly impacted, having relied on the relationship with the Youth Pastor.

i. Minister and Youth Pastor
In the theoretical and empirical research, the Youth Pastor’s relationship with the minister was critical to their satisfaction in their position (Kageler 2008: 773). In the MCSA, it is the norm for ministers to leave their position after a tenure of five years. For this reason, several of the participants had experienced a transition from one minister to another. In almost all cases this resulted in negative interpersonal dynamics, where the Youth Pastor found the new minister difficult to get along with or experienced serious theological differences.

The most common expectation that participants had of their senior minister was that of *personal support*. Several participants explained that their ability to function well was affected if the minister did not proactively offer them support and care. This expectation was
largely unmet, with most participants describing the personal support they received as poor and the spiritual support they received as non-existent.

ii. Youth Pastor and Youth
In almost all cases, participants who had departed from their positions described a decline in the youth ministry, making mention specifically of a loss of relationships. Even where participants explained that they had tried to establish programmes that could run independently, the youth were affected by the loss of the relationship with them.

iii. A Narrow Relationship Model

Illustration 1: Narrow Relationships

Illustration 1 seeks to depict my perception of such relational dynamics, whereby the Youth Pastor is dependent primarily on the minister for job satisfaction and the Youth are dependent primarily on the Youth Pastor for continued involvement in the youth ministry. The diagram does not indicate levels of authority but support structures. It is like a tower of blocks. When you remove the level below, the others are vulnerable to collapse.

5.2.2. Doubting the Impact of Youth Ministry
The empirical research suggested that one of the most important factors in longevity of tenure was the certainty that the effort of youth ministry was making an impact in people’s lives. Those who departed were likely to say “I was unsure if I was making a difference.” On the other hand, those who chose to remain for a longer tenure in spite of difficult circumstances were likely to say that they were motivated by the knowledge that they were making a difference. One of the key differences between Long Tenure and Short Tenure participants was that those who served a shorter tenure were more likely to report that the feedback they received was only ever negative.
5.2.3. A lack of Insight and Recognition Affects the Youth Pastor

In both categories, the number one interpersonal dynamic affecting Youth Pastors was the sense that they were not taken seriously or that the church leadership did not have insight into youth ministry. Several expressed frustrations at the traditional approaches of ministers in an older generation. Several expressed frustrations that their views were not taken seriously.

5.2.4. Negative Interpersonal Dynamics as the Reason for Departure

The problem statement observed that negative interpersonal dynamics often cause Youth Pastors to depart from their positions. On the one hand, the empirical research did confirm that for SD participants the primary reason was that the Youth Pastor had difficulties with the minister. On the other hand, the Long Tenure participants described negative interpersonal dynamics to the same extent and yet chose to remain in spite of these circumstances. The reasons for the departure of Long Tenure participants was not overwhelmingly as a result of such difficulties, but distributed equally across three reasons, namely (1) difficulty with the minister (2) no room to grow and (3) doubting whether their ministry was making an impact.

This raises the question whether there is more to the problem statement. Yes, negative interpersonal dynamics cause some Youth Pastors to depart, but others choose to stay in spite of these negative dynamics. A tension began to form, raising a further question:

“What are the factors that empower Youth Pastors to remain in spite of negative interpersonal dynamics?”

The outcomes of the interview begin in some small way to answer this question. The Long Tenure participants experienced similar difficulties to those of short tenure, yet they chose to remain. When asked about the factors that enabled them to remain in their position, their answers were similar: (1) A strong calling by God (2) Love for the youth (3) The satisfaction of knowing you are making a difference (4) A vision for the youth ministry (5) Responsibility to finish what they had started. In the course of their interviews, they were also more likely to:

- Give details about their call
- Describe a rigorous or meaningful interview process
- Report that they had a mentor outside of their local church

In contrast, the participant who served for the shortest tenure (under two years) described his enquiries about becoming a Youth Pastor as simply met with the words – “Go for it.”
findings that demonstrated the qualities lending themselves to a longer tenure seem to echo some of the traits described by Nel (2000: 120) – “adaptability, the courage to persevere, a life adjusted to priorities.”

This suggests that while extrinsic factors may contribute to the departure of some Youth Pastors, it is intrinsic factors that tend to make the difference for those who stay for a longer tenure.

5.2.5. A More Desirable Praxis

Illustration 3 seeks to explain a recommendation for relationships between the Youth Pastor, minister and others. In this diagram, the narrow line of relationships from minister to Youth Pastor to youth are replaced by a wider web of relationships whereby various role players anchor both the Youth Pastor and the youth in a network of care and support. The goal is for the Youth Pastor to enter into a church not relying solely on the minister for job satisfaction and support but on a wider group of people who are able to provide stability even when the tenure of the minister comes to an end. The goal is also that the youth themselves do not rely solely on the Youth Pastor for their enjoyment and involvement in the youth programme.

*Illustration 2: A Wider Web of Relationships*
5.3. PROPOSAL FOR CHANGE

The proposal for change is aimed at addressing some of the key problems identified and in increasing the likelihood of appointing Youth Pastors with the intrinsic traits necessary for long tenure youth ministry.

5.3.1. A Wider Web of Relationships

I have perceived that the youth depend narrowly on their relationship with their Youth Pastor and that the Youth Pastors depend narrowly on the relationship they expect to have with their minister. As a result, there is a great deal of distress when either the minister or the Youth Pastor depart from their position. I propose that churches seek to provide both the youth and the Youth Pastor with a wider web of relationships on which to depend.

Concerning the development of a wider web of relationships on which young people can depend, this will entail a greater effort to involve a significant number of adults in relational ministry with youth. It is not enough to develop programmes that will be sustainable after the Youth Pastor’s departure; sustainable relationships need to be the focus. It is my hope that strong connections between the youth and adults in the congregation will enable young people to maintain their sense of belonging and relational connectedness even in the event of a Youth Pastor’s departure. In this way, the youth ministry would not be severely disrupted and the church would not be impeded in its mandate to spiritually nurture young people. This wider web of relationships could possibly take the form of mentorship, intergenerational home groups and coaching among other strategies.

With regard to developing a wider web of relationships on which the Youth Pastor can depend, my recommendation is that the society employing a Youth Pastor puts into place:

i. A Youth Pastor Support Panel

Those in ministry need support. This panel would differ from committees that plan the youth ministry programmes in that their focus would be on the personal and spiritual support of the Youth Pastor rather than programmes, planning and logistics. Their role would be to meet regularly with the Youth Pastor to listen reflectively, offer pastoral care, provide personal support and give feedback. The feedback would differ from a performance review in that the
focus would be not on the nuts and bolts of the job description, but the sharing of tangible demonstrations of how the ministry of the Youth Pastor is making a difference in people’s lives. A typical session with the Support Panel would consist of a platform for affirmation and feedback, an opportunity for the Youth Pastor to reflect on the joys and struggles of the past month and an opportunity for the Youth Pastor to articulate their vision and express their needs. The purpose of this panel would be to provide the Youth Pastor with a wider network of relationships to anchor him or her in the event of the minister’s departure or times of conflict with the minister. It would also free the minister of the expectation that he or she provide personal support to the Youth Pastor while also trying to fulfil the role of employer. The panel would also provide suggestions for in-service training.

ii. Mandatory Mentorship
I propose that it is mandatory for every Youth Pastor to identify a mentor to offer spiritual support and guidance. The Youth Pastor who is not spiritually healthy cannot effectively sustain effective, authentic youth ministry (Clowney 1964: 4; Dean & Foster 1998: 42; Heflin 2009: 9; Kageler 2010: 21; Thomas 1910: 20). A mentor plays a role in the spiritual guidance and pastoral care of the Youth Pastor, but ultimately the Youth Pastor must take responsibility for his or her own spiritual development (Yaconelli 2005: 63).

iii. A More Rigorous Discernment Process
A more rigorous process of selection for Youth Pastors would help to ensure that those who enter youth ministry have the calling and traits necessary to sustain it (Callahan 1983: 45; Jones 2001: 225; Nel 2000: 119 – 120; Nel 2015: 168; Yaconelli 205: 53). This process can ensure that the “secret call” articulated by the prospective Youth Pastor is accompanied by the necessary competence and affirmation (Niebuhr 1956: 46). A more rigorous discernment process would help to redirect those applicants who do not have the necessary calling and competence (Heitink 1999: 312) but also provide assurance and affirmation for those applicants who are sincerely called and suitably gifted. It would give more opportunity to determine whether the individual is to avoid a “mismatched” hire (De Vries 2008: 100). It would address the concerns raised in MCSA conference resolutions in 2006, 2008 and 2013 about the “entry”, “recruitment” and “guidelines for appointment” of Youth Pastors respectively (http://www.methodist.org.za/news/02072012-1552). The selection process could involve a panel or make use of the existing structures in the MCSA such as the society Leaders Meeting or Circuit Quarterly Meeting.
iv. Clearly Defined Expectations

Much of the dissatisfaction expressed by the participants was related to unclear, inconsistent or unreasonable expectations. I recommend a careful process of clarifying expectations as soon as possible once an appointment has been made – possibly before. The following three aspects of expectations would need to be clarified:

**Youth Pastor’s Expectation of Self**

The participants provided different answers when asked to describe their own understanding of their role and when asked to describe the expectations placed on them. It would be helpful to engage with the Youth Pastor in an attempt to form coherence between the external expectations and that which the Youth Pastor expects of herself.

**Church Leadership Expectation of Youth Pastor**

The first step in supporting a Youth Pastor to meet the expectations is to ensure that the expectations are clear, consistent and reasonable. The expectations should be outlined by a group of individuals so that, once again, the expectations do not become too dependent on a single relationship and need to change drastically after ministerial transitions.

**Youth Pastor’s Expectation of Minister**

It is critical that Youth Pastors are made aware of what they can reasonably expect from their supervising minister and that it may be unreasonable to expect a significant amount of personal and spiritual support from a person who is also playing the role of employer. Spiritual support can only emerge from a context of a loving relationship. With the necessary structure and discipline required in a relationship between an employer and an employee, it is unsurprising that participants did not receive the spiritual support that they had expected. In addition, it is widely recognised that ministers are frequently left without adequate training in management skills (Fields 2002: 158). Given that almost all of the participants experienced some degree of conflict with their minister or found their minister to be controlling, it is further unsurprising that they were unable to perceive or receive spiritual support and guidance from the context of that relationship. Furthermore, the Youth Pastor needs to be made aware that it is ultimately his own responsibility to engage practices of “self-restoration” (Dean & Foster 1998: 192; Dean 2004: 91; De Vries 2001: 126; De Vries 2008: 114).
v. Greater Awareness of Youth Ministry

As the youth ministry is increasingly built around a web of relationships rather than linear, narrow relationships, more people in the congregation will play a substantial role in relational youth ministry. It is recommended that all those involved in relationships with the youth and the Youth Pastor are encouraged to see themselves as “ambassadors” for the youth ministry – taking every opportunity to build bridges between the young people and other entities in the church in an attempt to reduce the “silo” approach to ministry. All those involved in the youth ministry will see it as their role to help the congregation move toward an atmosphere whereby young people are valued, prioritised and incorporated into every mode of ministry in the church.

5.4. CONCLUSION

In the course of this research, several of my initial assumptions were challenged. While it was affirmed that the departure of Youth Pastors can indeed cause disruption to the youth ministry of the church, I came to believe that my initial hunch was unsubstantiated. I had approached the researched with acknowledgement of my presupposition that the key to improving the situation was in equipping ministers with the tools to build more positive relationships with the Youth Pastors. While there is no reason not to equip the role players with interpersonal skills, I have since come to believe that the most effective approach will be a widening of the relational network available both to the Youth Pastor and the youth to whom they minister.

Other important recommendations involve careful discernment to ensure that prospective Youth Pastors can articulate their call and demonstrate the traits necessary for youth ministry, particularly passion for young people and a sense of vision and responsibility. I have also since come to understand that while negative interpersonal dynamics do contribute to the struggle of Youth Pastors, this is less likely to lead to departure if the Youth Pastor possesses these qualities. The proposed solution is the development of a wider web of relationships which will ensure that:

- A more rigorous process of discernment ensures the necessary traits and Call are present
- Expectations are clearly defined and evaluated
- The youth as well as the Youth Pastor are provided with a web of relationships to provide support and stability beyond what one person can provide
- The Youth Pastor is provided with a platform to receive encouragement and feedback
Youth ministry is difficult. Not one of the ten participants implied that it is easy. Conflict, differences, inadequate resources and misunderstandings about the nature of youth ministry are inevitable. The Youth Pastor typically has little control over their senior minister’s appointment, tenure, leadership style and views. However, those Youth Pastors who are carefully selected and nurtured may remain in their position for long enough to make a lasting impact. In these instances, they too might look back after eight years in youth ministry and exclaim with longest actively serving participant from the sample group:

“I would do this again in a heartbeat. I’m actually sorry I didn’t do it earlier. Politics, church structures and attitude ... that was probably my reason for wanting to leave. My ministry itself? Never. Never, ever, ever! This is where I wanted to be.”


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Addendum A

- For what duration of time were you (or have you been) a Youth Pastor in the MCSA?
- What is your age?
- What is the estimated age of your senior pastor?
- What theological or other qualifications do you have

- Would you describe your understanding of your role as a Youth Pastor?
- Would you mind to tell me your story as a Youth Pastor in the MCSA?

- For those departed from their position:
  - Would you mind to tell me about the primary reasons for your departure?
- For those departed from their position:
  - How do you feel the youth ministry in the congregation was affected by your departure?

- What interpersonal dynamics in the church leadership have most affected you in your role?
- What is/was your expectation of the role of your senior minister?

- How would you to describe your relationship with senior pastor with regard to:
  - Personal and spiritual support
  - Providing in-service training
  - Supporting your projects and ideas
  - Giving appropriate feedback
  - Insight into youth ministry
  - Allowing you freedom to develop
  - Conflict

- What aspects of the senior minister’s leadership style did you enjoy and why?
- What aspects of your senior minister’s leadership style did you find difficult to accept and why?
- How would you summarize the expectations placed on you as a Youth Pastor?
- To what extent were you supported in meeting the expectations of your role?
- In what areas did you differ from the church leadership in your understanding of youth ministry?

- For those who have stayed: What aspects do you feel have helped you to remain in your position?